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Ida Chaloner's Heart.

By LUCY RANDALL COMFORT,

AUTHOR OF "CLAIRE'S LOVE-LIFE," "LOVE AND JEALOUSY," "MARRIED FOR MONEY," ETC.

GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET, NEW YORK.

IDA CHALONER'S HEART;

OR,

THE HUSBAND'S TRIAL.

BY

LUCY RANDALL COMFORT.

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IDA CHALONER'S HEART.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW PUPIL.

THE little black-walnut clock on the mantel had just struck nine.

It was a clear October morning, and from the Reverend Milo Gresham's window the view was as bright and changeful as any autumn piece that glitters on the walls of the Academy of Design.

Wooded hill-sides, all blazing with gold and crimson and russet browns—fields sloping gently downward, their stone fences draped with blood-red vines and clusters of brilliant sumac, and a broad, blue, shining river, reflecting the cloudless firmament in the intervening valley—one might almost fancy the world to be a picture, painted in colors which should never fade!

But the Reverend Milo Gresham saw none of these lovely things, as he sat in the shadow of the faded moreen hangings, with a book in his lap and a pile of papers on the desk before him.

He was a fine-looking, frank-faced man of about five-and-thirty, with fine, soft hair, worn bald on the top of his head, and mild blue eyes, while a pair of spectacles, perched on his Roman nose, bore silent witness to the near-sightedness which so often accompanies deep scholarship and close study.

His dress was worn and shabby, and glossy at the seams, while more than one elaborately executed darn ornamented the more prominent places; his slippers, once black velvet, worked in a bouquet of dazzling silk flowers, were threadbare and colorless, with little white spots rubbed at the toes; and his shirt, though white as snow, was evidently seeing its last days of respectable shirthood.

Mr. Gresham was one of those men—not by any means rare—who, notwithstanding a model character, high intel-

lectual cultivation, and a brain far beyond the average power and capacity, are still failures in the world.

At twenty, his friends had foreseen a brilliant career for him; at twenty-five, they had wondered why Milo Gresham was not doing more to distinguish himself; at thirty, he had somehow settled down into patient, plodding obscurity, with a wife and a flock of little ones, preaching mild sermons in an out-of-the-way parish, and eking out his pitiful salary by taking pupils to educate, and by "doing" translations and making indexes for a publishing firm, who paid him very poorly and complimented him very highly.

This was Mr. Gresham, who sat in his shabby little study, where the pattern was long ago trodden out of the Brussels carpet, and the chairs and tables mended in more ways, and more ingenious ones than the Patent Office ever dreamed of.

As he turned over the leaves of the big lexicon, with a pen between his teeth, and a considerate sort of frown contracting his brows, the door opened, and a pretty, fair-faced little woman entered, with a paper in her hand.

"My dear," said Mrs. Gresham, for it was she, "the butcher's bill has just come in."

"My dear," rejoined her husband, "it seems to me that the butcher's bill is always coming in!"

"It is a month since we paid it," she rejoined.

"My dear, it was only the day before yesterday!" he remonstrated.

"That was the grocer's bill."

"Oh, the grocer's bill, was it? Never mind—they all belong to the same generic family, and a troublesome race they are. How much is it, my dear?"

"Seventeen dollars and thirty-three cents. Have you got the money?"

The Reverend Milo rumpled his soft, thin hair with his white, scholarly fingers in perplexity.

"No, Selina, I haven't," was the answer.

"Then what are we to do?" she asked, querulously.

"My dear, I would suggest that you tell the man to wait," answered her husband.

"I did, Milo; but he says he has accounts to settle, and—"

"He always has, according to his own relation," said Mr. Gresham, somewhat bitterly. "However, I don't suppose we ought to blame the poor fellow for wanting what is righteously his own."

"Then," again urged his wife, "what are we to do?"

"I hardly know," said the Rev. Mr. Gresham, with a face

of ludicrous uncertainty, "unless we leave off eating meat altogether. I have always inclined to the theory that the Brahminical mode of life was healthful in the extreme!"

"But there are the boys!" said Mrs. Gresham.

Mr. Gresham's countenance fell.

"You speak truth, my love, there are the boys. One may starve one's self, but it is hardly fair to starve one's pupils! Well, tell the man I'll call round to-morrow morning, and in the meantime he had better leave us three pounds of liver."

As Mrs. Gresham, charged with this not very satisfactory message, left the room at one entrance, the corresponding door opposite, which communicated with the garden, opened, and three noisy boys rushed in, followed by a little cherry-checked girl.

"Uncle! uncle!" roared the eldest, who was a dark-browed boy of fifteen, the adopted child of the good clergyman, whose only legacies seemed to be penniless orphans, "Monty's been knocking over my Robinson Crusoe palisades!"

"Papa," chimed in a brown-faced, sandy-haired boy, a year or so younger, "it wasn't any such thing! Geoff knocked 'em over himself running at me with a big stick, and one of the poles fell on Angie's head, and raised a lump as big as an egg."

"What a story!" cried the first, breathless and eager. "Monty Gresham, I—"

"Well, then, just feel of the lump!" and little Angeline, hardly knowing in her bewilderment whether to laugh or cry, was pushed forward to her father's knee.

"My dear," said Mr. Gresham, smoothing down her curly head, "are you hurt?"

"No, papa," said the four-year-old. "It frightened me a little, though."

"There!" cried Geoffrey Moreland; "I told you so, Mr. Make-mischief."

"Papa!" roared the belligerent Monty, "ain't he to stop calling me names?"

"Angie," said Mr. Gresham, "go to your mother. Little girls should be at their patch-work. Geoffrey, is your Latin exercise prepared?"

"No, uncle; I—"

"Begin, then, at once," said Mr. Gresham, in a voice of that mild authority that not even the most rebellious of his pupils ever ventured to oppose. "Montmorenci, you have three pages in algebra to study—are they finished?"

"Papa, I thought I'd wait until afternoon before I done them."

"*Done* them, Montmorenci!" repeated his father, with a slight elevation of the eyebrows.

"*Did* them, papa," said the boy, laughing, and coloring. "But that's the way Harry Tudor talks, and I can't help catching his words now and then."

"You must watch yourself, Monty," said the father. "And as for the lessons, remember that now is the accepted time. Go to your desk. Harry Tudor, call James to his lessons; it's past nine."

Harry Tudor, a thickset, curly-haired boy of nine, turned reluctantly to the desk in the corner, with lingering thoughts of the fish-lines and tackle that were concealed under his copy-book.

"James has gone to the post-office, sir," he said. "Him and Eleanor went—"

"Harry!"

"Eleanor and him, sir," faltered Harry, not quite certain as to wherein his error of speech lay.

"*He*, my boy—*he* is the nominative to the verb in this case," admonished Mr. Gresham.

"Yes, sir. He, sir—he has went—"

Geoffrey burst into a peal of laughter. Montmorenci looked up from his desk with a smile. Harry Tudor turned very red.

"Geoffrey," said Mr. Gresham, reprovingly, "Harry's grammar is no worse than your manners. He is improving—I wish I could say the same of you. Get your books, Harry."

The door opened at this moment, and a tall, pretty girl of twelve years old came in, leading a child of six—Eleanor Gresham and her little brother.

"Two newspapers, papa, and a letter," she cried, as she laid the treasure on the study-table. "Run to your lessons, Jamie!"

The Reverend Mr. Gresham laid down his pen with a sigh. To him, a letter was simply the representative of a pressing dun or an unpaid bill. For with all his conscientiousness, and his earnest endeavors to discharge all honest liabilities, the Reverend Mr. Gresham was yearly getting more and more behindhand with the world.

He broke the seal mechanically, while little Jamie climbed on to his seat, and opened a big atlas, where the picture of the world was several times larger than his own golden head.

But, to the clergyman's surprise, the missive was no im-

perative request for money, no reminder of unsettled bills or neglected financial transactions.

Once—twice he read it over, and then rose and went into the room where Mrs. Gresham was paring apples for the modest family dessert of baked dumplings.

"My dear," he said, "I have just received a very singular letter—singular, and yet quite gratifying."

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Gresham, dropping the yellow apple she held between the finger and thumb of her left hand, "what can it be?"

"I will read it for you," said Mr. Gresham, unfolding the letter complacently, "and you can judge for yourself. It is dated New York City, October 14th, and begins thus:

"'REVEREND MILO GRESHAM—*Dear Sir*,—The fame of your exceedingly well-regulated family school has induced me, a stranger in this country, to place under your charge a young friend, whose education, although not entirely neglected, needs judicious care and thoughtful supervision. I am quite ignorant of terms, etc., but as I should wish the wardrobe, incidental expenses, and such other liabilities of my friend to be under your care, I inclose what would seem an appropriate provision for the first year's allowance—also a sum of fifty dollars to pay your expenses to the Hollisforde Hotel, New York, where your pupil will be awaiting you. I regret exceedingly that circumstances place it out of my power to accompany your new charge myself to Deepdale, but hope you will consider this another proof of the entire confidence I repose in you.

"'Please come as promptly as is practicable. Inquire for Room 16, Hollisforde Hotel. And believe me,

"'Yours very truly, PIERRE L'EPINARDE.'

"And this, my dear," said Mr. Gresham, enjoying the pleased surprise of his wife's face, "is the inclosure.

He shook a narrow, rustling slip of paper over her head.

"Not a five-hundred-dollar bill?"

"Yes, my dear Selina, a five-hundred-dollar bill! and there is a fifty besides, inclosed, as my correspondent thoughtfully remarks, for expenses."

"Oh, Milo!" cried the little woman, "I am so glad! It was not five minutes ago I was thinking how nice it would be if you could some way manage to get a pupil or two more, and this is so nobly generous."

"It is, indeed, my dear," said Mr. Gresham. "Five hundred dollars! and I never have had but three hundred. Per-

haps," he added, conscientiously, "I ought to state to this Mr. L'Epinarde that my terms are less exorbitant."

"I think not, Milo. He himself volunteers it."

"That is very true; and as the Scriptures say, 'The laborer is worthy of his hire,' I will endeavor rightly to discharge the responsibility now placed in my hands to the best of my ability. L'Epinarde—it sounds like a foreign name."

"I should think he must be a French gentleman," suggested Mrs. Gresham. "How fortunate it is, Milo, that you speak French!"

"It is probable, my dear, that Mr. L'Epinarde is quite conversant with the English tongue, as there are no idiomatic peculiarities in his letter. My dear, if you will pack my valise, I will go at once. Geoffrey and Eleanor can take charge of the younger children temporarily, and I shall easily be back in a day or two with this welcome addition to our little family circle."

Mrs. Gresham looked at the clock—it was ten, and the train which passed through Deepdale was due at twenty minutes after eleven.

"I wish your shirts were in a little better order," she said, nervously, as she untied the bib-apron worn to protect her faded calico dress from culinary contact.

"I dare say they will do very well," said Mr. Gresham, serenely.

"And your best coat—I sponged it last week, but the seams show very badly."

"An old coat is no disgrace, Selina."

"Oh, Milo!" said the poor little woman, with a mist before her blue eyes—the blue eyes that had been so bright and seductive fifteen years ago, when she and Milo had fancied the world's path to be all roses, "how hard it is to be poor!"

"We shall be rich, my dear, if we have many more such pupils as this," said her husband, cheerily patting her cheek. "So get the shirts ready, and if Noakes troubles you any more with his bill, tell him we're coming into our fortune."

Great was the excitement in the family school-room when the news of Mr. Gresham's very unusual journey was communicated to them.

"Papa, I wish I could go with you," said Montmorenci, looking envyingly on the valise that was to be his father's traveling companion.

"You must stay and take care of mamma, my boy," said Mr. Gresham. "I shall bring back a companion for you, I hope, whom you will like."

"Ain't it jolly?" cried Monty, balancing himself, first on one foot and then on the other. "I wonder how old he is?"

"A frog-eating Frenchy," cried Geoffrey, disdainfully. "I know I sha'n't like him!"

"Papa," said the truthful Eleanor, who was on her knees, tying the strings of Jamie's dusty little shoes, "do you suppose he is a Roman Catholic?"

"I don't know anything about it, my daughter," was the abstracted reply, as Mr. Gresham put away the scattered papers in his desk.

"There's no end of frogs down in the swamp lots," said Harry Tudor, who had been reflecting on Geoffrey's observation.

"Won't we have larky times catching 'em? Must we call him monsieur, Mr. Gresham?"

"Boys, boys!" remonstrated the clergyman, as he tried to fasten the lock of an overpacked valise, "I wish you would leave off asking foolish questions. I depend upon you to make great progress during my absence, and I trust you will receive this strange boy, doubtless a foreigner by birth, with kindness and cordiality, which will tend to make him forget his loneliness."

"Papa," said Jamie, wistfully, "I'll give him half my kite-string."

"Papa," lisped Angie, standing on tiptoe to get hold of her father's little finger, "he shall have my string of blue glass beads."

"Oh, get along," said Montmorenci, contemptuously; "he won't care for such small fry as you! I'll show him the cave down under the old quarry rocks, and Geoff will let him read the new 'Robinson Crusoe,' after Eleanor gets a cover sewed on. That's what'll suit him if he's worth anything."

The whole family stood on the porch, watching Mr. Gresham's departing footsteps, as he strode down the walk, carrying in one hand a valise, in the other a green gingham umbrella.

"Don't papa look nice?" said Eleanor. "I wish he could afford to wear his best clothes every day."

"I wish I and Geoffrey were going with him," sighed Montmorenci. "New York must be such a bully place!"

"Papa wouldn't like you to use such words as that," said Eleanor, reprovingly.

"You're only a girl," was the slighting reply. "I say, Geoff, let's go down to the cave, after we've done lessons."

Little Angie sat on the step, her dimpled cheek resting on one hand.

"Eleanor," she said, softly, when the other children had all gone in, and the two sisters were alone in the bright, October sunshine, "I couldn't go down into the wet swamp to help the boys catch frogs, but if the French boy really likes such things, there's an awful fat toad in mamma's flower-bed."

Eleanor burst out into a merry laugh, as she caught the little child up in her arms, and ran with her into the house, as if she had been a large kitten.

"It's only Cousin Geoff's nonsense," she cried, kissing the flushed, rosy cheek that was pressed against her own; "but you're a darling little thing, Angie, and if the French boy don't like you, he'll have very poor taste, that's all I've got to say."

CHAPTER II.

IDA CHALONER.

A RAILWAY journey nowadays is no particular novelty to most people, but Mr. Gresham's secluded life had rendered him an exception to the ordinary rule. Every mile of the way was full of interest and incident to the simple-hearted gentleman. The scenery, the little crowds at every station, the faces of his fellow-travelers, were all productive of infinite amusement to him, and he was sorry rather than otherwise when they reached the terminus of their journey. Other people might complain of dust, heat, uneven rails, and cramped seats, but to the Reverend Milo Gresham the journey was one long treat.

"I really wish I could have afforded to bring Geoffrey and Montmorenci with me," thought the kind-hearted clergyman. "They could hardly have failed to be benefited by the varied contemplation of human nature, which— Hey—halloo! What's the matter?"

A little crowd had gathered round the honest gentleman's rear, as he thus soliloquized; and a policeman stepped forward, with a yellow silk pocket-handkerchief in his hand.

"This yours, sir?"

Mr. Gresham put his hand into his pocket. It was empty!

"It is mine, sir," he said, with puzzled courteousness; "though how it came into your possession I am at a loss to conjecture."

"It's only Slippery Bill, sir," said the policeman, with a shake of the bundle of rags which seemed to be writhing and

twisting beneath his grasp. "Picked your pocket, sir. Excuse me, but, as you seem to be from the country, I'd advise you to keep a trifle sharper lookout for your property."

"I am obliged to you, sir," said Mr. Gresham, lifting his hat, but at the same time wondering how the policeman had discovered that he was from the agricultural districts. "And as for the poor boy, pray let me intercede in his behalf. I dare say he will not repeat the offense if you—"

The policeman grinned broadly as the small victim howled out vehement protestations of "never doing it again."

"Bless your heart, sir," he said, "he's been doin' of it ever since he was born, and he'll keep it up until he's hanged! Stop your bellerin', you!" to the boy; "you'll have time enough to holler when you're on the Island."

And Mr. Gresham went on his way, pondering sadly on the depravity of human nature as evinced in the character of "Slippery Bill."

It was a long walk to the Hollisforde Hotel, and a wearisome one. The burning city pavements, shaken with the thunder of omnibus wheels, and reeking with dust, were not like the green paths which led through the sylvan meadows at Deepdale; and honest Mr. Gresham felt a painful consciousness of being in every one's way, as he dodged backward and forward before the current of the hurrying throng.

"Everybody seems to be in such haste here," thought the clergyman, wiping his heated brow with the providentially rescued pocket-handkerchief. "Ah, dear me! the profanity of the hack-drivers is quite shocking; and every other person one meets with would appear to be a beggar. I have given away all my small change already, and I am not altogether certain, upon second thoughts, that the recipients of my poor charity are quite worthy. I wonder if this can be the Hollisforde Hotel?—a magnificent building, truly!"

The Reverend Mr. Gresham surveyed the glittering marble pile, with its abundance of carved ornamentation, and its rows on rows of shining windows, white from the effect of the lighted stores beneath; it seemed to stand on foundations of light.

"I can not be mistaken," thought the clergyman, as he read the name, "HOLLISFORDE HOTEL," in plain marble letters over the porticoed door-way; and turning, not unwillingly, from the bustling throng which occupied the pavement, he entered the large, long room, paved with blocks of colored marble, and now lighted up with chandeliers, which seemed like clusters of miniature suns all ablaze.

"Room No. 16," said Mr. Gresham, to a servant, "if you please. I am expected."

The man looked curiously at the quaint figure which stood, valise and umbrella in hand, in the middle of the room; but the half smile which hovered round his lips was at once checked by the calm, dignified look of the stranger's mild eyes.

"I will send some one up with you, sir, directly," he said, "if you will be kind enough to wait a minute."

Mr. Gresham sat down on the velvet-cushioned settee, which extended along the wall, put his valise by the side of him, and rested his crossed hands, pilgrim-like, on the crooked handle of his umbrella, until a tall young man came to him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "Are you the gentleman that was expected at Room 16—the Reverend Mr. Gresham?"

"That is my name," said the clergyman, rising.

"We were told to show you upstairs, sir, directly on your arrival. The young person is waiting for you."

"Ah—indeed—all right."

Mr. Gresham followed his guide up two flights of wide stairs, carpeted so softly that the footfall was quite inaudible in its golden-brown pile, and along a broad corridor, with numbered doors on either side, until they came to "No. 16," in small, silver-plated letters.

With a bow and a motion of the hand toward this door, the tall young man withdrew, Mr. Gresham thanking him with a precise, old-fashioned courtesy for his kindness, as he knocked softly.

There was no reply at first, but on a second and somewhat louder application of the clergyman's knuckles, a voice from within called out:

"Come in!"

Mr. Gresham, in accordance with these words, opened the door and entered.

It was a large room, frescoed in panels, and illumined with chandeliers and fire-light, for, mild as was the evening, the grate was heaped with a ruby-red mass of burning coals, and on a velvet sofa drawn up in front of the blaze sat, or rather reclined, a girl of ten years old among the folds of a gold-fringed shawl of some gorgeous Eastern manufacture. She was dark, with large, soft eyes, dark curls, which hung over her shoulders, and cheeks where the vivid blood seemed fairly to shine through the transparent skin in peach-like crimson. Her dress was peculiar, and seemed strangely inappropriate

for a child of her years—it was of black velvet, belted around the waist, and gold bracelets clasped her dark, slender arms, while a double strand of gold beads encircled her throat. A book lay in her lap, and one cheek was pillowed on her hand, as she looked composedly toward the door, like a graceful tableau out of some Eastern romance.

Mr. Gresham stared in surprise.

"Come in," said the child, as he stood hesitatingly on the threshold; "I've said 'come in' twice already."

"I beg—I beg your pardon," said the embarrassed clergyman; "I must have mistaken the number of the room."

"No," said the child, "I don't think you have mistaken the room. Are you Mr. Gresham?"

"Yes."

"It is all right, then; I am Ida."

Mr. Gresham was beginning to wonder vaguely whether he was beginning to lose his senses, or whether the pretty child before him was herself slightly crazed.

"And who is Ida?" he demanded.

She fixed her large dark eyes inquiringly upon him.

"Ida—Ida Chaloner," she repeated; "the child who is to be educated. Didn't Mr. Pierre tell you my name?"

Mr. Gresham sat down on a chair, totally bewildered, and once more wiped his brow with the yellow silk pocket-handkerchief.

"I—I thought you were a boy!" he said, in a sort of mild despair.

Ida's laugh, as hearty and child-like as her appearance was strange and Oriental, reassured the good clergyman that it was really a human creature who sat before him among the golden fringes of the silken shawl, and no elf or brownie from the world of the unreal, and he himself could but smile at the oddity of his mistake.

"Did Mr. Pierre say I was a boy?" she asked, after a minute.

"Why, no—not exactly," said Mr. Gresham, taking his pocket-book out and extracting the letter in question from its folds; "but somehow I received the impression that— I see, now, he simply mentioned you as a young friend. Dear, dear!" he added, looking about him, "this is very strange indeed; quite unaccountable, upon my word! My dear! where is Mr. L'Epinarde?"

"Do you mean Mr. Pierre? He has gone."

"Gone where?"

"I don't know," said the child, indifferently. "To Paris, I suppose, or Rome, or some of those places."

Mr. Gresham's eyes opened wider than ever.

"When did he go?"

"This morning."

"And left you here alone?"

The little girl nodded with equanimity.

"Why not? I am used to being alone."

"But you are such a child."

"I am ten years old and three months."

"Did he leave no word?"

"No—what word should he leave? He has told me Mr. Gresham would be here in a day or two to take me to school, and I was to go with him."

"This is really the most remarkable proceeding of which I was ever cognizant!" muttered Mr. Gresham, quite unconscious that he was speaking aloud. "Shall I take her or shall I leave her? I must take her—the five-hundred-dollar bill leaves no alternative, but— My dear," he said, turning once more to the figure on the sofa, "what is Mr. L'Epinarde's address?"

"I am sure I don't know," said Ida, indifferently.

"My dear child! and where are you to direct when you write to him?"

"But I never write to him."

"Is he your uncle?"

"No."

"Your brother, perhaps?"

"He is no relation at all."

Mr. Gresham drew along breath, which was half a sigh and half a groan. The riddle was growing more complicated every instant.

"Then how did it happen that he brought you here?"

"He always brings me to school. He brought me to Paris when I was only four years old. I always do as he says."

"Do you like him?"

"No," said Ida, with a curious light in her deep eyes; "I hate him."

"My child!"

"I do!" persisted Ida; "and I believe he hates me."

"But where is your father?"

"I haven't a father, nor a mother, nor any relations at all."

"My poor little girl!"—Mr. Gresham's mild hand rested compassionately on the dark silken curls that flowed so softly over the little round shoulders—"tell me about your life."

"Oh!" said Ida, almost impatiently: "I haven't anything to tell. I have been at school in New Orleans and in Paris, and now I am to go with you."

"Where is your home?"

"Home!" repeated Ida, with something of a puzzled look; "oh, anywhere it happens. Here just now; in Paris, last month, at Madame de Bassompierre's!"

Mr. Gresham looked at the strange creature, and thought of his own cherished little daughters in their home-nest, surrounded with protecting love and ever-increasing tenderness, and a sentiment of pity crept into his heart.

"Ida," said he, "yours is a strange story."

"Everything is strange in this world, it seems to me," she answered, carelessly; "but I am used to belong to nobody, and as long as I have plenty of money I don't care. See!"

She opened a little purse which she drew from the folds of her dress, and showed the glimmer of gold pieces behind its net-work.

"More than two hundred dollars of money," she said, gleefully.

"You had better let me keep it for you," said Mr. Gresham, astonished to see so much money intrusted to the hands of a child.

"No," said Ida, resolutely, returning the gold to its hiding-place; "I will take care of it myself; no one shall take it away from me."

"Be very careful of it, then, my child." Ida shrugged her shoulders rather scornfully.

"I have taken care of money before now; more than this," she said. "I don't mind things when I have money; but sometimes Mr. Pierre has forgotten to pay the bills—oh! for a long time, and people have been so cross, and I have been so miserable!"

"But if this Mr. Pierre—by whom, I suppose, you mean Mr. L'Epinarde—is no relation, what claim have you upon him?"

"I don't know," answered the child; "I think you ask a great many questions."

Mr. Gresham could not but acknowledge to himself that this remark was founded in truth.

"Well, Ida," he said, after a few minutes of grave thought, during which Ida opened her book, and resumed its pictured pages once more, as if she had been quite alone, "I will take you home with me and do my best to fulfill the onerous charge with which Mr. L'Epinarde has intrusted me. But, as we can

not go until to-morrow morning, we must wait patiently. By the way, how did you come here? From what place, I mean?"

"We came from Liverpool in a steamer, last week, but we stopped in some other city first—Boston, I believe, and Mr. Pierre left me here only this morning."

"Do you like it here?"

"Yes," said Ida; "I should like to stay here always. Mr. Gresham, will you ring that bell? I have not dined yet; I want my dinner."

"Dinner at seven o'clock?"

"We always dine late," said Ida, nonchalantly.

Mr. Gresham pulled the bell-tassel accordingly, and presently a servant appeared.

"What shall I order, my dear?" said Mr. Gresham; "what would you like? Some bread and milk, or a little cold chicken! or—"

"Bread and milk, cold chicken! that is for babies!" said the child, throwing aside the folds of the shawl, and sitting upright. "I will give my own orders." Then, turning to the man, she calmly said: "Some soup Julienne, *mon garçon*, and some quails or ortolans, roasted, and a pie or tart, *meringue*, with some Neapolitan ice for dessert. Don't forget celery, and olives, and a bottle of champagne, and grapes or peaches, it don't matter which, with the dessert.

"Ida!" said Mr. Gresham, who had sat appalled at this deliberately enunciated order, "you must not drink champagne!"

"*Must* not?"

Ida's cheeks glowed scarlet, and the tip of her little slippered foot patted itself ominously upon the carpet.

"Who say *must* not to me? I am a Chaloner, and the Chaloners are not slaves!"

"But, my child, it is not good for you."

"I don't care whether it is good or not. I like it—and I am going to have what I like."

Mr. Gresham, internally convinced that this little foreign-born creature had not been very practically brought up, resolved to do his best to uproot these weeds of character, but not at this moment. Once won by gentleness she might, perhaps, be remodeled at will, but if her wayward affections were estranged now, it might be a life-long mistake.

"Ida," he said, gently, "I do not wish to constrain you in any respect; I merely advise you. Do as you please to-night."

"Will you dine with me?" asked the child, in as dignified

a style as a queen might have assumed in asking an embassador to partake of her hospitality.

"Thank you," said Mr. Gresham, "I will order a cup of tea and a beefsteak; I do not fancy your wines and your foreign dishes, my dear."

"Ah," said Ida, looking dreamily into the fire, "you have never lived in Paris, nor dined at Les Trois Frères."

"My little girl," said Mr. Gresham, "do you know that you talk very strangely for a child?"

"I am not a child," said Ida; "that is, not in some things. I am not like the little girls I used to see at Madame de Bassompierre's. How should I be? They have parents to take care of them. I have to fight my own way."

"But you will be a child again when you come to my home, I hope."

"People don't go backward in their lives," she answered, shrewdly. "Are there many little girls in your school?"

"It is hardly what you have been accustomed to consider as a school," he answered. "I have two little daughters—Eleanor, who is twelve, and Angeline, who is four; and two little boys and a nephew. Then there is another boy who is being educated with my children."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Is your wife nice?"

"I think so," said Mr. Gresham, with a smile. "She will try to take a mother's place to you, Ida, if you will let her."

Ida Chaloner's reply was quite unexpected.

"But I shall not let her."

"Ida," reproved Mr. Gresham, gravely.

"I don't want a mother. Madame de Bassompierre always said she was a mother to her pupils, and so did Mrs. Pinkney, in New Orleans, and they were both—oh, they were *cats!*"

Ida hissed out the last word between her set teeth as Mr. Gresham had never yet heard it pronounced.

The good man looked disturbed.

"Ida," he said, "we will not talk about these things now. Time will settle them all. Here comes your dinner. I will order mine, and you must retire early, for we have a long journey before us for to-morrow."

"I never go to bed early," said Ida, dipping her spoon daintily in the *soupé à la Julienne.* "Twelve o'clock is a very good hour."

Mr. Gresham looked despairingly at the little figure in the gold jewels and the velvet dress. Of all the pupils who had

ever been domesticated at Deepdale, this one, he foresaw, was likely to be the most intractable and wayward.

"Poor child," he said, almost in a whisper, "it is plain to see that you have been brought up fatherless and motherless."

"But you needn't sit up for me," said Ida, rather patronizingly. "You look tired—and I don't mind being alone. There is a very obliging chamber-maid here on this floor, and I can ring if I want anything. Waiter, these olives are not fresh. Take them away, and bring some more."

Mr. Gresham, his own simple meal soon concluded, sat and watched the little velvet-robed lassie sipping her champagne, eating the fragrant, many-colored ices, and varying the order of things by now and then a grape, or a slice of a peach, uneasy in his mind, yet scarcely venturing to make any further remonstrance.

"We shall reform all this after awhile," he thought, hopefully; "and I almost wish I had not undertaken this charge."

When the dishes were removed, and Ida Chaloner was once more nestled on her sofa, Mr. Gresham endeavored by gentle and judicious questioning to elicit from her the particulars of her brief life-time. But of her own personality she seemed to know almost nothing except her name and age, and the fact that "Mr. Pierre" had always exercised a sort of supervision over her, quite unaccompanied, however, with aught resembling interest or affection.

Mr. Gresham sat confounded. The idea that a child could live to be ten years old in utter ignorance of her own birth, origin, or parentage, and be floating round the world like a stray waif, with no definite hold or claim on any one, seemed to him so visionary and improbable that, had another told him of the circumstance, instead of his coming under his own personal observation, he would have scoffed at it as a mere fabrication of fancy. Once or twice he looked up at Ida, sitting before the fire with one gold-banded arm thrown over the curve of the sofa, and the dark, soft curls lying on her shoulders, and asked himself whether, after all, this was not a dream—whether he should not wake up presently and find himself sitting among the lexicons and encyclopedias at his study-table in Deepdale.

"Verily," pondered the Reverend Milo Gresham, "truth is stranger than fiction; and I seem to have come in contact with one of the strangest of all the truths."

Wearied out and drowsy though he was, he persisted in sitting up until the French time-piece on the marble mantel had chimed twelve, and Miss Chaloner had graciously consented

that the chamber-maid should be rung for to conduct her to her own apartment.

"I am not sleepy," said Ida, as she wrapped the gorgeous Eastern shawl round her small form; "but I dare say you're tired, Mr. Gresham, and I'll not keep you up any later. Good-night. I'll be up to breakfast at nine."

"But, Ida, the train leaves at eight."

She pouted out her cherry lips.

"How tiresome! Then I suppose we must breakfast earlier?"

"At seven, at the latest," he answered.

"Seven, then," said Ida; "I dare say I can be up for once."

Mr. Gresham thought of the six-o'clock breakfasts of the household at Deepdale, and wondered within himself if his brisk little wife could ever induce this strange being to conform to the ways of their quiet, regular life.

"At all events," he said, mentally, "we are bound to make the trial."

CHAPTER III.

MONSIEUR PIERRE L'ECHELLE.

WHILE the Reverend Milo Gresham was endeavoring to persuade himself that Ida Chaloner and her strange surroundings were actual reality, and not the idle phantasms of an overtasked fancy—while the fire-light was mirroring itself in the amber contents of the slender-stemmed champagne-glass, and the capricious fingers of the child were culling out the bluest grapes and the rosiest peaches as she lingered, with Sybarite enjoyment over her dessert, a far different, yet not dissimilar, scene was transpiring in the suite of rooms directly underneath.

Larger rooms, more elegantly furnished, and, probably far more expensive; curtains of dark-green velvet, looped up with immense gold tassels, concealed the lace-draped windows; deep sofas filled the embrasures, and a carpet of deep green, without pattern or device, was bordered with a narrow arabesque of gold color at the sides of the room. The furniture was all of polished rosewood, upholstered in the same material as the curtains; and on the marble hearth a low, clear fire was burning, guarded by a steel fender. In the middle of the room, where the shaded drop-light of emerald glass cast a vivid circlet of brightness—leaving the rest of the apartment in a green semi-twilight, such as one sometimes finds at noonday

in the shaded aisles of dense-foliaged woods—a table was spread, apparently with dessert—wines of red and topaz color, in decanters of cut-glass, on silver stands; fruits, such as were almost worth their weight in gold at that season; silver baskets of tropical nuts; and pink water-ices in crystal chalices, surrounded a bouquet of hot-house flowers, whose perfume made the air oppressively sweet; and, on a stand beyond, a silver ice-pail, with the wired neck of one or two bottles protruding beyond the glittering lumps that filled it, betokened a wise provision for future wants.

One of the sofas was drawn up in front of this table, and a dark, handsome man was stretched idly among its cushions, dallying with the array of dainties, very much as the velvet-robed child upstairs was doing at the self-same moment.

That is to say, he was handsome, as far as straight, regular features, and a certain gross animal beauty of outline go; but there was a hard, cruel glitter in the coal-black eyes, and a curve of the full red lips that would have repelled the physiognomist. His very actions partook of these characteristic elements; there was a certain repressed ferocity in the way he severed with a silver knife the slices of pine-apple, and rolled beneath his tongue the wines he tasted. His dress, rich and plain, was in the most perfect taste, and his white, well-shaped hands, with slight dimples at the knuckles, were those of a gentleman by birth, if not by natural instinct.

"Giuseppe!"

It was a strange voice, low and melodious as a flute, yet with an underlying hardness in its clear tone. And as he spoke, a man advanced, who had been standing in the shadow beyond, with folded arms and an attitude of waiting attention.

"Monsieur!"

"You are a scoundrel, Giuseppe," leisurely remarked the gentleman, extracting a bit of Madeira nut from its brown, wrinkled shell, and moistening it with a draught of the topaz-colored wine.

"As monsieur pleases," was the answer, spoken with a scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulders.

"I don't know why I don't discharge you," went on the master. "Certainly it is not for lack of—this sherry is a degree better than one generally finds in these execrable States—of a full knowledge of your demerits."

"Perhaps it is," suggested the servant, "because monsieur knows that no more faithful slave to his wishes could exist than the poor Giuseppe! Money will buy much, but it can not buy a heart like this!"

He touched his breast slightly as he spoke.

"Stuff, Giuseppe!" was the contemptuous reply. "You are a born actor. I believe you'll die *en tableau* one of these days."

There was no reply, except by a slight drooping of the head, as Giuseppe stood quite silent before the glittering table.

"So," went on the master, after a momentary silence, during which he rejected a beautiful peach with a scarcely visible blight upon its side, "the old priest from the country has come. You saw him yourself, Giuseppe?"

"I saw him myself, monsieur."

"I wonder what he thinks of the wolf's cub?" said the other, with a low laugh, as if he were mightily diverted within himself. "Upon my word, I should like to hear their discourse!"

The servant smiled.

"It's a relief to have her off my mind, though," he added. "Mind you're on hand, Giuseppe, to see them off. I shall not feel easy until it is over."

"I shall not fail to execute monsieur's commands."

"Giuseppe!"

"Monsieur?"

"Get out of this. I'm tired of your cat-eyes upon me. Set the ice-pail close to me, and take yourself off until I ring for you."

"Yes, monsieur."

Giuseppe, who moved as softly as a sick-nurse, obeyed his master's commands, and silently withdrew.

The dark-haired gentleman yawned slightly, as he turned on his sofa so that he could look into the bright depths of the fire, and listened for an instant. Then he arose, and set the door ajar suddenly.

"Giuseppe!"

"Monsieur?"

"What, in the name of all the fiends, are you hanging about the door for—eavesdropping?"

"A thousand pardons—I fancied that monsieur called."

"I did not call—and you never thought I did. Giuseppe! I have two minds to pitch you down-stairs, for a lying vagabond, as you are."

"If monsieur chooses to abuse the faithful devotion of one who worships him, I, at least, have no word of remonstrance," said the man, with a sort of proud humility.

"Get along with you," said his master, sharply. "Down-

stairs, I say—I shall stand here until you are safely out of sight. Get along with you, for a treacherous hound."

His voice, though suppressed, as if he had no mind to be overheard, was one of the intensest scorn and anger. Nor did he close the door as he returned, but left it half open, so that from his sofa he could, by the turning of his head, command the corridor in front.

"I'll not be taken unawares," he muttered, to himself, and then drawing from the inner breast-pocket of his coat a large, flat pocket-book, or case, he opened it, and began a leisurely inspection of its contents.

Gold, notes, jewels, and papers, that little square receptacle contained a vast deal that was valuable, and the hard, dark eyes seemed to catch a momentary glitter from the reflection of the precious stones and coin. Then he replaced it next his breast, and lighted a cigarette, which he proceeded to smoke with folded arms and head thrown back, in *dolce far niente* fashion, among the velvet cushions of the sofa, like some wild animal basking serenely in its native jungles.

He was thus lying when a footstep so light and elastic as to be quite inaudible, sounded on the carpeted hall without, and the figure of a lady paused momentarily in its onward passage, as if suddenly arrested by some strange and unexpected sight.

She was tall and graceful, with a brown dress of some silken foreign stuff, and a brown scarf falling loosely about her shoulders, and plain linen circlets at throat and wrist, relieved only by a crimson ribbon bow, yet on her finger blazed a solitaire diamond of great value, and there was in her whole carriage something almost royal. Not yet thirty years of age, her bloom was rich as that of a girl, and no wrinkle marred the dazzling purity of brow and cheek, while the masses of golden hair that shadowed her oval face were netted back, after the picturesque fashion of the day.

"Merciful Father!" she ejaculated, as she stood there with her hands pressed to her heart. "I can not be mistaken—it is Pierre!"

The next moment she had glided into the room, and stood before the man on the sofa.

"Pierre! Pierre L'Echelle!"

He took the cigarette languidly from his full, red lips.

"Beatrice! upon my honor this is an unexpected pleasure. I had imagined you to be in Florence."

"And I fancied you in Switzerland."

"A mutual misunderstanding, it would seem. But perhaps you object to smoking?"

She made a slight disdainful motion of the head.

"A most excellent cigarette," he said, with a sigh; "but to the pleasure of your society, Beatrice, I most willingly sacrifice it. Will you sit down?"

But she remained standing, the color coming and going on her cheek, and her blue eyes growing almost black.

"Pierre, how did you come here?" she asked.

"I might ask the same question of you, madame."

"You know how and why—*you* know for what I am eternally seeking," she cried, passionately. "Oh, Pierre, have you a heart of marble?"

"Don't get excited, Beatrice; it is very bad for a sanguine temperament like yours. How did I come here? On business, which it would be useless to explain to you."

She drew near to him, and laid the jeweled left hand on his shoulder.

"Are we friends, Pierre?" she asked, tremulously.

His square forehead darkened, and a sudden ray flashed from beneath his contracted brows.

"No."

"But, Pierre, are we enemies?"

His answering smile was cruel as the grin of a hyena.

"Are we not? As you please, Beatrice. I declare you have grown handsome—you'll be astonishing us all by making a grand marriage yet. The L'Echelles were always a handsome race."

"Pierre," pleaded the lady, "tell me of *her*—of my baby. Where is she? How is she? Does she ever speak of me?"

Pierre L'Echelle poured out a glass of wine and drank it.

"Beatrice," he said, when he had replaced the glass on the table, "what is the use of asking foolish questions?"

She sunk beside him on the floor, her hands clasped in an agonized appeal.

"Tell me, Pierre, if it is only one word. Oh, if you knew how my heart hungers after her! I know I was wayward and willful, but you have punished me enough, surely. Give her back to me, Pierre."

His laugh jarred strangely on her pleading voice.

"There's a good deal of the tragic element in that speech, Beatrice. Rachel herself could hardly have improved on the upward accent of that last sentence."

"Pierre, are you man or devil?"

"Man, my dear—man. Of the two, man is incomparably the worse, according to my theory."

"But you will not leave me ignorant of her?"

"Beatrice," said L'Echelle, composedly putting the tips of his fingers together, "I think you should understand me a little better than this, after the years we have known each other. I swore to be revenged; I am keeping the vow—you yourself can testify how faithfully."

"But you have been revenged—yes, a thousand-fold!"

"Not sufficiently. I am like the mills of the gods—*mia amica*—that grind slowly, yet exceedingly fine. As to your child—"

"Tell me of her," gasped the bereaved mother, her hand tightening on Pierre L'Echelle's shoulder.

"I can not, Beatrice, if I would."

Beatrice's face became as white as ashes.

"Pierre! she is not dead?"

"Yes; she is dead."

Beatrice fell a senseless heap to the floor, and low, inarticulate moans issued from between her lips.

Pierre watched her for a moment in silence, while an evil smile beamed over his cruel, scarlet lips.

Presently Beatrice raised her head with a set look of anguish in her face that might have melted a heart of adamant.

"When did she die, Pierre? Why did God deny to my mother-heart one instinct to tell me the moment when her sweet spirit passed away? Where have they laid her? Surely you will tell me now."

"I said she was dead, Beatrice," the man answered, "and so she is dead, to you, but she is neither coffined nor buried. She lives; but you will never see her again."

A groaning sob broke from the lady's oppressed heart.

"Pierre, Pierre, how could you be so cruel? Oh, it was worse than the bitterness of death. Then she is alive and well?"

"I have already told you, madame, that I have no information to give."

"One clew—one hint! Oh, Pierre, I shall be satisfied with so little!"

He took from his breast the small, square pocket-book, and smiled fiendishly in her face.

"Do you see this book?" he asked.

"Yes!" she answered, breathlessly.

"Here are all the clews that exist to the past, present, and future of that unhappy child; and here," he deliberately replaced it, "they shall remain."

She sprung at him with a vain attempt to wrest the treasure from his hold.

"Beatrice!" he cried, with a savage sparkle of the eye, "if you attempt that again I will strike you down as if you were a log of wood. Do you want to alarm the house?"

He was holding her at arm's-length, and eying her with ill-concealed ferocity.

"Why should I not?" she cried, passionately, the blue eyes blazing, the cheeks crimson, and every muscle under the satin skin quivering with excitement. "What have I to lose or gain? Why should you not be brought to justice?"

He stooped and whispered one sentence in her ear; she drew back pale and shivering.

"Must I endure this still?" she gasped. "Pierre, have you no mercy or compassion in your heart?"

"Do you know, *mia cara*, there was murder in those blue eyes of yours just now? You are dangerous, Beatrice—absolutely dangerous!"

"Are not the very animals dangerous, Pierre," gasped the lady, "when they are robbed of their young? There *was* murder in my heart, God be merciful to me! if my hand had been half so strong as my passion."

"There, there, Beatrice, this is no stage—your fine transports are quite thrown away on me."

He spoke wearily; she watched him with an eager gaze.

"You will tell me nothing more, Pierre?"

"No, I shall tell you nothing more."

The quiet resolve in his last words checked those that were rising to her lips. She turned away, cold, pale, and faint.

"Shall I see you to your room?" he questioned, courteously. "I fear you are not well."

He had risen to his feet, but she repelled him with a motion of her hand.

"Ah, you prefer solitude; let it be as you please, my dear," he said, sinking luxuriously among his cushions once more.

He watched her out of the room with immovable complacency.

"Ah—h—h!" he muttered to himself, "revenge is sweet—very sweet. I had no idea of the flavor of the morsel until I found it underneath my tongue. I shall sleep well to-night; yet I must keep an eye on this half-mad woman. If she and the little wolf cub should chance to meet—but pooh! she could not know the child, in spite of her foolish romance about mother-instinct. All that is necessary is for me to keep well in the background, and all will go smoothly. If she did but dream that the child was even underneath this roof! *Madre di Dio!* that is the sweetest morsel of it all! I would not

have missed this episode for half a kingdom! I shall tell Giuseppe, when he comes in, to keep an eye on the lady. He should be here by twelve o'clock. In the meantime another cigarette will enliven the solitude."

At twelve o'clock precisely, by the chiming of a tiny time-piece on the wall, Giuseppe entered, stepping softly, as was his wont.

"Monsieur has heard the clock?" the man hazarded, after a moment or two of respectful silence. There was no answer. Giuseppe advanced a pace or two.

"Monsieur!" His voice was a little louder now. "It was at twelve that I was to attend you."

Still no answer. Giuseppe stepped backward to where a servant stood at the door, carrying an ice-pitcher on a tray.

"You may bring it in," he said. "Monsieur sleeps."

The man came in, and as he did so Giuseppe removed the green glass shade. The light flooded the room with sudden brilliance, and Giuseppe started back, his sullen brow pale with a new whiteness.

"Monsieur! Oh, Heaven that is above us, he does not sleep! Monsieur is dead!"

It was as Giuseppe, in his blank terror, had said. M. Pierre L'Echelle lay dead and cold among the velvet cushions, the half-smoked cigarette lying on the carpet at his side, one hand clinched, the other hanging down, limp and stiff, while on the floor, a yard or two distant, a small dagger lay, its blade discolored by the blood which had ensanguined it from a deep though not large wound on L'Echelle's breast.

Giuseppe's cries of terror and distress in his strange, foreign tongue roused the house, and aid was promptly called in. And, at the same moment that the Italian rushed frantically screaming from his master's room, the heavy rumble of the hotel coach wheels thundered from the door.

It was the coach for the half past twelve o'clock express to B——, and by its open window, crowded by other passengers, sat the lovely lady with the golden hair and blue eyes, one cheek leaning on her jeweled hand, and her gaze riveted on the darkness of the midnight sky.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAVELERS ARE DETAINED.

"A MURDER!" cried the Reverend Milo Gresham. "This is very strange—and very sad also. And in the room directly beneath this, you say, my man?"

"Yes, sir," answered the waiter, delighted to get a new audience for the catalogue of horrors he had to recite; "a foreign gentleman, sir—leastways his servant is an Italian, and you'd think the poor fellow was going crazy. A pretty commotion they're in, sir, below stairs."

"And did they succeed in obtaining any trace of the murderer as yet?"

"Dear no, sir. The coroner hasn't come yet."

"Very sad—very sad, indeed," sighed Mr. Gresham, mechanically buttering his toast.

Ida Chaloner, looking stranger and prettier than ever by the morning light, in her velvet dress and gold jewels, was breakfasting in an outlandish sort of way—at least so it appeared to the Reverend Milo Gresham—on iced claret and rolls. She looked up as the clergyman spoke.

"People die every day, don't they?" she said, putting a second lump of ice in her wine-glass. "Where's the use of making such a fuss over one man?"

"Yes, my dear," answered Mr. Gresham, mildly, "you are quite right, they die every day, but not by so sudden and violent a death."

"What difference does it make *how* one dies?" asked the child, with her big eyes fixed full on the good man's face.

"Much, my dear, because—what did you say? the coach at the door for the early train?"

Mr. Gresham rose hurriedly, for a servant had entered to announce these tidings.

"Are you ready, Ida?"

The child tied on a small black velvet hat, with a silvery grebe's feather on it, by way of ornament, and twisted a scarlet cashmere scarf with unconscious grace across her shoulders.

"Yes, I'm ready. Tell them to bring the fringed shawl and my books."

And thus attired, Ida Chaloner marched down the stairs, the good clergyman following after, painfully conscious of many eyes being upon his curiously costumed charge. She looked like an Indian princess—like a picture—like some tiny actress on the boards of a theater—like anything in the world, in short, but a little girl going to a country school.

"Mrs. Gresham will soon set all that right," said the Reverend Milo to himself; "but I wish we were at our journey's end. Ida," he said, aloud—"Ida, my child!"

"What?"

She spoke with no disrespect, only a deliberate self-assertion.

"I do not exactly like—that is, I hardly deem your dress suitable for the cars. I think we shall have time, on the way, to purchase a small water-proof cloak, which—"

"Do you want to wear it?" asked Ida.

"I, my dear? Assuredly not, for—"

"Then don't buy it," said Ida, briefly. And she jumped down the stairs two at a time.

"Is this the room where the man was murdered?" she asked, her quick eye catching sight of a little group gathered round a door below. "I want to see how a man that has been murdered looks."

"You can't go in, miss," said a middle-aged man who sat by the door-way, reading a newspaper. "The order is not to—"

But Ida Chaloner, quick and lithe in her motions as a fawn, shot past him into the room, regardless of the hand he stretched out to detain her.

"Ida!" cried good Mr. Gresham, in sore distress of mind—"Ida, come back this instant! Will some of you servants please bring her out? It is no place for a child." And he thought of his shy, modest Eleanor, with mute marvel that children *could* be so unlike.

"Why," cried Ida's voice from the inner room, "it is Mr. Pierre! Isn't it funny that Mr. Pierre should be murdered?"

And she came out again, swinging her scarf in one hand.

"He looks ugly," she observed, readjusting it on her shoulders; "but he always looked ugly. I touched his hand, and it was cold as marble. He looked just as if he was alive, lying there among the cushions. Why don't they put him in a coffin!"

"Ida, I don't altogether understand this," said Mr. Gresham. "Do you mean that the gentleman who has been murdered is the one who brought you here?"

"Yes," answered the child, nodding her head until the dark curls danced up and down over her shoulders more fantastically than ever. "It's Mr. Pierre."

"All aboard! coach just going!" bawled a hoarse voice at the head of the stairs.

"Come, Mr. Gresham," chirped Ida, running on ahead; "come, or we shall be left."

But a hand was laid on Mr. Gresham's to detain him.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I hope the delay will not prove inconvenient to you," said a mild voice, "but as the young lady seems to know the name of this unfortunate man, per-

haps it would be better that she and you remained—at least, until the inquest."

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the country clergyman, gradually beginning to realize the involvement of which he found himself the unwilling center. "Ida! Ida! my dear, do you hear what this gentleman says? But it *will* be inconvenient, sir; and if the child's testimony is not absolutely wanted—"

"She had better remain," said the other, one of the landlords of the hotel, as Mr. Gresham afterward learned. "You can easily telegraph to your friends, sir. The jury is paneled for eleven this morning, and the detention need not prove serious."

Mr. Gresham meekly submitted. He was a man who had been accustomed to a life-long abdication of his own will in favor of others; nor was the struggle a long one in this instance. Ida Chaloner, also, was quite satisfied to remain a few hours longer in New York.

"I think it's nice at this hotel," said Ida, jumping up and down on the stairs.

"And you're not afraid of the inquest, miss, dear?" said an admiring chamber-maid, who was brushing down the carpet with a tiny japanned dust-pan and a hand-broom.

"No," said Ida; "an inquest can't hurt me. What is it, anyhow?"

"Oh, a lot of men sitting in the room with the corpse, and asking you a sight of questions."

"Questions?" said Ida, soberly. "Questions in arithmetic or geography?"

"Bless your heart! miss, no. Questions about what you know of the dead man."

"Oh, is that all?" said Ida, evidently relieved. "I can't tell them much. I never saw him but a few times."

"And aren't you sorry for the poor gentleman?" asked the chamber-maid, lackadaisically.

"No," answered Ida, contracting her black brows; "I'm glad he's murdered."

The woman gave a little shriek.

"But, miss—"

"Lydia," said a grave voice, speaking over the balustrades, "Lydia, the child is not to be questioned. Attend to your work."

The woman colored, muttered something, and obeyed.

Ida, deprived of this temporary companionship, climbed up into the end window of the hall, and flattening her pretty little nose against the panes of glass, looked dreamily down upon

the tumult below; and Mr. Gresham, by way of composing his bewildered mind, sat in the reading-room, plodding his patient way through the morning newspapers.

The inquest was brief, and by no means satisfactory. Giuseppe Antonardi, servant of the deceased, was the first witness called.

His grief was nearly overwhelming, and at times quite choked his utterance. Evidently there was something in his faithful allegiance quite foreign to American ideas of the relationship between master and servant.

His statement, when reduced to writing, was simple enough. He had left his master at about ten o'clock quite well. Even then some vague suspicion that something was not right induced him to return and listen at the door. His master had reproved him for it. His master often scolded; but he, Giuseppe, never minded him. It was the kindest heart, messieurs, that ever breathed. And here Giuseppe broke into fresh tears and lamentations. And at twelve, according to his orders, he had come to prepare his master for bed; and—the hotel servant knew the rest; Giuseppe had no words to relate it.

"What was your master's name?"

"Pierre Antoine L'Echelle."

"A native of what country?"

"Born in Burgundy, France; at least so Giuseppe had always heard him say."

"How old?"

Giuseppe could not be certain; he thought, however, not much over thirty. Yes, the gentlemen were right; he did look older than that, but monsieur had always been a great traveler, and had never spared himself. Nevertheless, Giuseppe thought he could not be far above thirty.

"How long have you been in his service?" was the next question.

"For nine years. I entered it at Florence, Italy."

"Was he a good master?"

Giuseppe clasped his hands, and his lips quivered.

"The best of masters, Holy San Giuseppe! and the most liberal; always prompt with his wages; always liberal with gifts. Oh, messieurs, I shall never find such a place again!"

Mr. Gresham, standing by, wiped his spectacles, quite moved at the Italian warmth and energy of the poor man's grief.

Giuseppe had no idea who could possibly have done the fatal deed which launched a soul unprepared into eternity. "Enemies! Monsieur L'Echelle was a man who had no

enemies. The good and noble—ah, they know not what the word enmity means!" As for other inducements to commit the crime, Giuseppe shrugged his shoulders. His master was not a rich man, surely not. His watch was costly, and Giuseppe thought he had about his person a pocket-book containing money and jewels, family relics; and "beyond that, no inducement, surely no inducement."

Further investigation brought out the facts that the watch, with its heavy chain of unalloyed gold, was missing—also the pocket-book. The coroner looked grave. Did Giuseppe think there was enough money in the pocket-book to tempt the avaricious to murder his master for the mere sake of booty? Giuseppe did not know. M. L'Echelle always paid his way like a prince, but Giuseppe had never supposed him to be a rich man. Still it was possible. Monsieur was not one who paraded his wealth.

Other inquiries elicited few facts.

Giuseppe knew little of his master's family or friends. He had always been traveling since Giuseppe entered his service, and corresponded not at all. Finally the witness was dismissed, and went back in tears to take his faithful place beside the corpse.

Little Ida Chaloner was next called. She took the oath according to instructions, and looked composedly around the group, with the dignity of three times her years.

"What is your name?" mildly questioned the coroner.

"Ida Chaloner."

"How old are you?"

"I was ten last July."

"Where do you live?"

"Oh, most anywhere—at the Hollisforde Hotel just now. I lived in Paris last month."

"Did you know the deceased?"

Ida nodded, with a look of aversion in the direction of the sofa-cushions.

"What is his name?"

"I don't know what his name is. I call him Mr. Pierre."

"How long have you known him?"

"A long while," said the child, pressing one hand to her forehead with a troubled look, as if trying to recall something. "I have known him ever since I can remember."

"Did you like him?"

"No," said Ida, frankly, and looking the coroner full in the face, "I hated him."

Giuseppe started to his feet.

"The signorina must not say such things of my master," he cried, passionately.

"Hold your tongue, Giuseppe," said Ida, with scornful contempt. "I shall say what I please. You are nothing but a servant."

The coroner restored order with some difficulty; and Ida, after she had called Giuseppe a score or two of names in very good Italian, consented to answer further questions.

No; she did not know where Mr. Pierre lived; he was no relation to her; she thought he disliked her; she was certain (with a defiant sparkle of the eyes toward Giuseppe) that she disliked him. He had always paid her expenses; she supposed he was rich. He had brought her there the day before, early in the morning, had left her in the charge of the chambermaid until Mr. Gresham of Deepdale should come to her; and kissed her good-bye, but she had not kissed him back again—she never kissed people whom she hated (another glance at Giuseppe). He had told her he was going back to Paris; she supposed him to be gone; had no idea he was still at the hotel, until she saw his dead body. And then, after a few more unimportant questions, Ida was dismissed, and ran off to play with a fat white poodle dog which belonged to some lady boarder at the hotel.

The Reverend Mr. Gresham's letter was next produced and identified by Giuseppe, notwithstanding the fictitious signature appended, to be the handwriting of the deceased; and beyond these unsatisfactory facts nothing could be learned.

The dagger, which had been pounced upon as a valuable link of evidence, proved to be quite useless. It was a small, foreign-looking toy—so small and slight indeed that it was a matter of marvel that the taper blade could have inflicted so fatal a blow—and bore, on an engraved shield on the handle, the name of a Parisian firm. But as many of these daggers had been imported into this country, this furnished no special clew. Giuseppe had never seen such a dagger before; his master was not in the habit of carrying concealed weapons—and there inquiry ceased.

The final verdict—that Pierre Antoine L'Echelle came to his death on the — day of October, 18—, at the hand of some person or persons unknown, was readily resolved upon. Mr. Gresham, when the official proceedings were over, came forward and had begun some incoherent speech concerning his willingness to refund so much of the money advanced in behalf of Ida Chaloner as would be necessary to defray the fu-

neral expenses, when Giuseppe advanced, with swollen, tear-stained eyes:

"No, messieurs," the faithful servant said, hoarsely, "the money is doubtless in right of the signorina. Let it remain. I, Giuseppe, am the only remaining friend of Monsieur L'Echelle, a poor, humble friend, but not ungrateful. It is for me to bury him in the cemetery where others of his faith lie interred. I am not rich—no, messieurs, but in his service, the service of one who was most generous and liberal, I have saved something; to his memory let it be dedicated!"

"Poor fellow!" said the coroner, as he nodded assent to Giuseppe's ill-pronounced English, "there really must have been something remarkable in this L'Echelle to attract the man to him so faithfully."

Of course there was no objection to Giuseppe's proposal; there seldom is when men are not asked to put their hands into their own pockets, and Mr. Gresham felt considerably relieved when he reflected that Ida's little fortune would not be trenched upon.

Nor was he sorry to find himself in the evening train for Deepdale, a newspaper in his hand, and Ida kneeling upon the cushions opposite.

The necessity for a few minutes of quiet in which to compose his mind and reflect upon the strange scenes through which he had just passed, was almost imperative. The country clergyman, whose existence had for years been a sort of patient unvarying tread-mill of monotonous toil, had momentarily been lifted, as it were, out of his ordinary sphere; nor was he dissatisfied to feel himself once more settling into it.

"This is a noisy world and a bewildering one," said the Reverend Mr. Gresham to himself; "and I am best out of its tumult and turmoil."

CHAPTER V.

IDA'S NEW HOME.

LITTLE Angie Gresham, in a stiffly starched pink calico dress, and her yellow curls, yet wet and dripping from their manipulation over Eleanor's fingers, was perched on a wooden-seated chair, straining her round blue eyes out of the second-story window for the expected coming of her father. She had been sorely disappointed in the evening when, instead of "papa" himself, a telegram, unsatisfactory, and briefly worded, had arrived.

"Unexpectedly detained. Will come on the evening

train," was all the message contained, and the children, who had rallied *en masse* to meet their father, had exhausted their juvenile brains in conjectures as to what could possibly be the cause of his detention; and now, as the time drew near for his actual coming, Mrs. Gresham, busy in the kitchen, could not but congratulate herself that the mysterious palisaded hut, now in course of preparation down by the river-side, made the boys oblivious of the passage of the hours and minutes.

"I shouldn't have a second's peace if they were here," thought Mrs. Gresham, as she poured off the grape jelly she had just finished straining through a flannel cloth.

"Mamma! mamma!" cried a small, shrill voice, and Angie toddled into the room, with crimson cheeks and eyes sparkling with excitement, "he's coming—papa's coming, and what do you think—the little boy is a girl!"

Mrs. Gresham set down the wide-mouthed pickle-bottle, which her housewifely ingenuity was converting into a jelly-jar.

"Angie, child, what on earth do you mean?"

"It is true, mamma," said Eleanor, who had followed her little sister down; "he is coming up the path below the stone wall, and there's a strange-looking girl with him, dressed in black velvet, with some sort of a red shawl dragging on the ground behind."

"My goodness gracious!" was Mrs. Gresham's comment, as she hurriedly washed her hands at the sink and untied the apron which encircled her trim little waist, "what does all this mean?"

Ida Chaloner took her introduction to the Gresham family very coolly, inclining her head ceremoniously to Mrs. Gresham, when that kind lady would fain have taken her to her motherly heart with a welcome kiss, and taking no notice of Angie, who stood on tiptoe to put up her little cherry lips.

"Is this your house, sir?" said Ida, glancing round as she stood in the middle of the room.

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Gresham, who had been explaining to his wife, in a whisper, the singular circumstances which had transpired during his absence; "how do you like it?"

"I think it is a very common sort of place," said Ida, slowly. "What kind of a carpet is that?"

"It is made of rags, my dear," began Mrs. Gresham, coloring a little, "and—"

"Rags! I should think it was!" echoed Ida; "and such low walls! I feel as if they were going to fall on my head.

Somebody take this shawl. Little girl," to Angie, "call the servant."

"We don't keep a help," said Angie.

"What is a help?" asked Ida, turning to Eleanor.

"She means a servant," explained Eleanor, with a distressed look toward her mother. "I'll take your shawl, Ida."

"No servants!" repeated Ida; "why, you must be beggars. I never was in a place before where they didn't have servants."

"You will soon get used to it, Ida," said Mrs. Gresham; "we all wait on ourselves here. Eleanor, take your friend up to your room, where she can prepare for tea. Don't mind her, Selina, my dear," he whispered to his wife, "it's only her strange foreign way."

"I wish that little girl with the thick shoes would stop staring so," said Ida, loftily, with a motion of her head toward Angie, who stood directly in front of her, the rosy hands clasped over her belt, and the blue eyes fixed steadfastly on the stranger's face.

"Angie, come here," said Eleanor, gently. "Ida, shall we go upstairs? This way, please," for Ida had turned toward the hall.

"Isn't there any other way?" demanded the child, with a very perceptible elevation of her upper lip. "I don't like to walk over a carpet that is made of rags."

But she went upstairs, nevertheless, and allowed Eleanor to bathe her face and hands, brush out her silken black curls, and remove the dust from her dress with a little broom, which was kept for the Reverend Milo's Sunday coat.

"You shouldn't have worn this dress in the cars," said thrifty Eleanor, in a voice of mild reproof.

"Why not?" demanded Ida, who was reclining sultana-like on the bed, and allowing the other little girl to wait on her, as if it were a special favor.

"Because it gets so dusty. Only see there, in the folds. Will you please stand up?"

"No, I won't," said Ida, calmly. "What would you do, if you hadn't any other frock?"

"No other frock than this?"

Ida nodded.

"I only have a dress at a time, and I wear it all the while, and then I buy another. Don't you like the frock? I selected it."

"It is very handsome," said truthful Eleanor, "but—"

"But what?"

"I think a calico would have been more suitable."

"Calico, indeed," said Ida, "but you don't know. You live on a carpet of rags, and you don't have servants. Get me a glass of water!"

"Ida, please don't," remonstrated Eleanor, as the stranger nestled her head away among the pillows. "You are spoiling all the curls."

"I don't care!" said Ida, sharply. "The water! Don't I tell you I am thirsty?"

"There is a pailful down-stairs, with a gourd in it," said Eleanor. "Perhaps you had better come down now. The tea-bell is ringing."

Much to Eleanor's relief, Ida assented to this proposal, and followed her down to the room where the family were already gathered round the humble table.

"Ida," said Mr. Gresham, "take that chair by Mrs. Gresham."

And then, as the boys rushed into the room like whirlwinds, Mr. Gresham introduced them to his little charge. Geoffrey and Montmorenci bowed stiffly, Harry Tudor put out his hand, which Ida utterly ignored, and little Jamie smiled his welcome, as he climbed into the chair next to Angie.

Bread and milk and sliced peaches, with a small piece of the plainest kind of cake, was a new diet to Ida; but as she really was very hungry, and, moreover, saw nothing else on the table, she managed to make a very hearty meal. Her hunger appeased, she looked deliberately around, and caught Geoffrey Moreland's eye, at the moment in which he crammed a huge wedge of cake into his mouth, winking at her as he did so.

"Well, Miss Chaloner," said Geoffrey, the moment he could get his breath, "what do you think of the Deepdale Rectory?"

"Is this the Deepdale Rectory?"

"Yes."

"It's a horrid, stuffy little place!"

Geoffrey stared in amazement at this remarkably plain-spoken statement.

"And what do you think of the people who live in it, Miss Black-velvet?"

"Of you?"

"Yes, of me, if you choose."

"I think you are tall and ugly, with a brown face and a crumpled cravat!"

"And *I* think you are a rude little pussy-cat," retorted the

discomfited Geoffrey. "What did you come here for if you don't like us?"

"I didn't come here, I was brought here."

"And where's the difference, Miss Queen-of-Sheba?" he demanded, sarcastically.

"What do you call me that for?" she asked.

"Because you look exactly like the picture of the Queen of Sheba, in that queer little black velvet dress, with the gold crinkum-crankum round your arm."

Ida glanced complacently down at her bracelets.

"Yes," she said; "I think they are very pretty."

"I don't, then. Why don't you dress like other girls? Eleanor looks a heap sight better than you do."

Ida looked up, and her eyes sparkled ominously.

"It is false—she does not."

"She does, too!" persisted the merciless Geoffrey, who was delighted to discover that he had power to tease the newcomer. "Why, one would think you were a little negress, with your black skin and your gold chains, and your odd, outlandish dress!"

"Geoff, don't tease her!" remonstrated Eleanor, sorely distressed.

"Feel her hair, and see if it ain't woolly," went on Geoffrey, while Monty chuckled audibly.

Ida rose up, and walking deliberately round to the chair wherein sat her tall tormentor, inflicted a sounding slap on his cheek—a slap so vigorously given that the pink prints of her fingers remained in five dots.

"There!" she said, vindictively.

"Ida! Ida!" exclaimed Mr. Gresham, who had until now been talking absorbedly with his wife. "My child, what does this mean?"

"Let her alone, uncle," said Geoff, with a grimace. "I thought it was only a mosquito biting my cheek."

"He called me a negress?" said Ida.

"Geoffrey!" said Mr. Gresham, reprovingly.

"Well, hasn't she an Ethiopian look, sir, in that outlandish dress?"

Monty giggled. Harry Tudor looked apprehensive of another onslaught on the part of the visitor.

"Boys," said Mr. Gresham, gravely, "you may come to my study. Eleanor, I trust to you to make Ida as comfortable as possible."

And he left the room with his convoy of boys, meditating how best to organize a permanent peace.

"I hate that tall fellow," said Ida, energetically.

"My dear," said Mrs. Gresham, "little girls should not say 'hate.' It is too strong a word. As for Geoffrey, he is a great tease, but he has a very kind heart; you must not mind him."

"Do you wash the plates yourself?" said Ida, diverted from the contemplation of her wrongs by watching Mrs. Gresham collect all the dishes together in a deep tin pan.

"Yes, and Eleanor wipes them; would you like to help?"

Ida pursed up her lips and shook her head.

"I am not a servant."

"Neither am I, my dear," said the lady, mildly.

"You look like one, and you are dressed like one," said Ida, superciliously eying the clergyman's wife.

Mrs. Gresham went on with her work in silence; she hardly knew what to say to this strange little creature.

"Are you tired, Ida?" she asked, after a few minutes, during which, with Eleanor's help, the dishes were all washed and put away, while Angie sat in her little arm-chair, gravely nursing a headless doll, and shyly watching the stranger from underneath her long eyelashes.

"No."

"Yet you have traveled a long distance."

"I have traveled before now," said Ida, coolly. "If you will ring for lights, I will read a little."

"Eleanor," said Mrs. Gresham, "bring a candle—or, perhaps, my child, you had better go into the study; papa always burns wax-candles there."

Ida obeyed; but her reading was soon interrupted in this new sphere by the interest she took in a busy game of marbles between the four boys; and presently she was down on the floor in their midst, her silky curls hanging disheveled over her face, playing, as Monty declared, "'most as well as if she was a boy."

"Come," said Geoffrey, patronizingly, as she made a particularly brilliant shot, and lifted her large eyes to his, full of sparkling triumph, "you're a pretty jolly sort of fellow, after all, in spite of the Queen of Sheba."

"If you call me that again—" began Ida, breathlessly.

"What objection have you?" asked Geoffrey. "The Queen of Sheba was a very gorgeous person—at least so I have always heard."

"I don't care whether she was or not; if you call me that name again, I'll knock you down."

The other boys burst out laughing.

"Ida, you ought to have been a boy," said Harry Tudor.

"I wish I was," cried Ida, shaking back her curls. "Come, Harry, it's your shot now."

"But I say," went on Geoffrey, "if you come any of that knocking down game on a poor little fellow like me—"

Ida rose up, and dropping her marbles on the floor, marched solemnly out of the room.

"There," said Monty, "you've driven her off with your nagging, and I'm real sorry, for she aims the best of the whole of you!"

"I'll go and bring her back," said Harry Tudor.

But all his persuasions were of no avail, Ida would not return.

"I'll play with you, when that big, tall fellow is gone," she said, resentfully; "but not before."

When the little girls went up to their room, Ida examined the sheets of the small white bed in the corner, which Mrs. Gresham told her was to be hers.

"Cotton!" she said, contemptuously. "I always sleep on linen."

"But, Ida," said Mrs. Gresham, "we have no linen sheets."

"And a counterpane made of little cloths sewed together!" commented Ida. "I never saw such a thing before."

"That's patchwork, that is," chimed in little Angie, eagerly. "I'm making a patchwork in stars!"

"However," said Ida, "I suppose it will have to do, seeing you are such poor people."

"We are not poor," said Eleanor, indignantly. "Mamma, are we?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Gresham, "it is no disgrace to be poor. We certainly are not rich. Ida, where is your night-dress?"

"I haven't got any," said Ida.

"Why, what did you sleep in last night?"

"The chamber-maid at the hotel lent me one."

"Where are your own?"

"I had only two," said Ida, swinging her small white feet backward and forward as she sat on the side of the bed; "and one was all worn and frayed, and when I came from Paris, Mr. Pierre was in such a hurry for the boat that I never thought of them."

"And your other underclothes?"

"My bag was left in Paris, too. Mr. Pierre said I could easily get more. I've got lots of money," she added, triumphantly.

"My poor child," said Mrs. Gresham. "That is right, daughter," as Eleanor brought forward a neat little folded robe of her own, and slipped it over Ida's shoulders. "Now, Ida, for your prayers."

The child scrambled into bed, with a merry, defiant laugh.

"Prayers! I never say any."

"Never say any prayers?"

"No," said Ida. "How sweet these sheets smell—as if they were full of roses. What should I say prayers for? Mr. Pierre says they are all humbug. I used to have a string of beads once with a cross on it, but—I—lost it."

The last words were drowsily spoken, as if slumber were already overshadowing the luminous foreign eyes.

"But, Ida," said Mrs. Gresham, very heartily disturbed, "this is all wrong. Try to repeat a prayer, no matter how short!"

"I can't; I've forgotten 'em long ago."

"Can not you say 'Our Father which art in Heaven?'"

"No."

"Then, Ida, listen to me. I will repeat it, and you shall say 'Amen.'"

"Any way for peace in the family," said Ida, sleepily.

So Mrs. Gresham, kneeling by the bedside, slowly and reverently repeated the sacred words. At their close she paused. There was no response.

"Ida," she said, mildly.

"Well—what is it?" demanded the child, petulantly. "I was asleep."

"But I wanted you to say 'Amen.'"

"'Amen,' then—half a dozen of 'em, if you please—and now do let me go to sleep."

"Mamma," whispered Eleanor, as her mother paused, ere leaving the apartment, to tuck up the clothing of the bed where her own daughters lay, "isn't it dreadful? Only think of it, a little girl who don't know her prayers!"

"She has been negligently brought up, Eleanor," said Mrs. Gresham, in a low voice. "We shall soon teach her better, I hope. And be sure you are very kind to her, for she is away from her native land, and papa says she has neither father nor mother."

"But she speaks so rudely to you and papa, mamma."

"I don't think she means to be rude, dear. It is only her way. Go to sleep now, and don't let Angie throw the clothes off and get cold."

Mrs. Gresham went down-stairs to her husband's study, where the good man was deep in his books.

"Well, my dear Selina," he said, looking up, "what have you done with the little tropical bird?"

"She is safe in her nest. Oh, Milo, what a responsibility this is we have taken upon ourselves! Only think! the child knows no prayers; tells me in plain words that she never says any!"

Mr. Gresham looked disturbed.

"I suppose that is the Roman Catholic element of her education."

"But I have always heard that the Roman Catholics are more punctilious about their devotions than we ourselves."

"Then it is total neglect. Poor child! Selina, we must do our best to plant good seed in the untilled garden of her heart."

"Milo," said Mrs. Gresham, who had already heard from her husband the particulars of his assuming this strange charge, "the five hundred dollars, with care and economy, will last a couple of years—"

"And she tells me she has some money of her own," interrupted Mr. Gresham.

"Yes, she has some of her own; but it will all be needed to provide her at once with decent and suitable clothing for the approaching winter season. And have you ever thought, my dear husband, where all future supplies are to come from? You say yourself that she is without living friend or relation. Who is to meet the inevitable expenses of the future?"

Mr. Gresham placed his hand tenderly on his wife's shoulder.

"Selina," he said, "do you remember the words of the Psalmist, 'I have been young and am now old, yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread?' The Lord will provide; let us leave all these anxious cares in His hands. Evidently she is placed in our hands through His righteous providence, and He will find for us a path out of the troubled ways."

And so Mr. Gresham resumed his books.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LOST CHILD.

THE next day or two was a holiday at the Reverend Milo Gresham's family school. Ida Chaloner's anxiety to explore the woods, fields, and rocks surrounding her new home was so extreme, as well as natural, and the other children were so

eager to accompany her on these tours of inspection, and play cicerone to the spots they had known and reveled in from childhood, that Mr. Gresham suspended work for a brief while.

"It will be all the better when they are settled down," he thought, indulgently. For the children, notwithstanding the stormy clouds of discord which overhung their first meeting with the little stranger, were beginning to grow very fond of her. True, she was imperious as a small despot well could be—changing in her moods, and instantaneous in vengeance, but then there was a singular attractiveness in her vivacity, and a perpetual fund of amusement in following up her original ideas which these country children fully appreciated.

"She's a queer little fire-fly," quoth Geoffrey Moreland.

"Oh, I like her so much," said Harry Tudor.

"She can tell the jolliest fairy stories you ever heard," chimed in Montmorenci. Even Eleanor was beginning to think Ida might be a very nice companion, after all, and little Angie was never weary in following after the swift footsteps of the foreign child.

But when study once more commenced, Ida proved the most difficult pupil the Reverend Mr. Gresham had ever undertaken to train into scholarship. It was not that the child lacked natural ability, of that she had plenty, but the deficiency was in steady-trained application. Ida Chaloner learned, as Harry Tudor envyingly remarked, "at railroad rate," when she chose; but when she did not choose, no snail ever was slower. Moreover, her education, if the term could be applied to aught so incomplete as was her intellectual cultivation up to this time, had been superficial in the extreme. She spoke fluently in French, but she could not conjugate a French verb; she expressed herself readily in the Italian language, but she could not have spelled the commonest word in the lexicon; she could draw from nature, after her fantastic fashion, dance like a queen of the ballet, and sing pretty little ballads to Mrs. Gresham's long-disused guitar; but she could not repeat the multiplication table, and made even Angie laugh at her ludicrous mistakes in the simplest outlines of geography. With all this, she despised history, and had a demure fashion of substituting her beloved book of fairy tales, in the place of the well-thumbed school volumes behind the tall ledge of her desk.

"Ida," said Mr. Gresham, despairingly, when, after a long morning of what he supposed study, she was found totally ignorant of the reign of Richard the Third, and Harry, called up as an unwilling witness, had accounted for this vacuum of ideas by the fact that "Sis had been reading the picture-book

with the blue cover"—"Ida, I shall certainly be obliged to take that book away from you."

Ida's dark eyes shone, as a summer cloud shines before the red lightning bursts from its overcharged heat.

"You dare not!" she cried, stamping her tiny foot; "it is mine!"

Mr. Gresham had long learned how impolitic it was to check Ida Chaloner as he would have checked one of the others; consequently he overlooked the glaring rebellion of her voice and manner.

"I would not wish to, certainly," he answered, quietly; "but, Ida, what else can I do? Your lessons must be learned. Take this history, and go back to your desk."

Ida obeyed, and in ten minutes returned, her lesson perfectly committed. Mr. Gresham internally congratulated himself on this easy victory; but he had not done with trouble yet.

"I hate arithmetic," said Ida, as she rumpled her curls mercilessly over the multiplication table—"I hate it! I hate it! and I never can learn this beast of a lesson."

"I can say it all, Ida," said Angie, complacently, "clear up to twelve times twelve."

"I am not a parrot," returned Ida, disdainfully, "and I wish you'd hold your tongue, Angie."

"Ida," said Mr. Gresham, when the ear-marked book was brought to him, and the little girl failed signally at three times eleven, "do you know how many days you have been on this table?"

Ida shook her head.

"How many?"

"Nine days. Now I think if you were really to set yourself to work you would conquer it in one lesson."

"It's so hard," complained Ida.

"No, my dear, it is not that," returned Mr. Gresham, gravely; "you didn't really try—that is all."

Ida did not answer, but the dark eyes were clouded and downcast.

Suddenly the sound of voices outside the door attracted her attention. She brightened in an instant.

"Geoff and Harry," she cried, "going down to the Robinson Crusoe cave! Oh, Mr. Gresham, can I go with them?"

"I think, Ida," was Mr. Gresham's mild, considerate reply, "that Robinson Crusoe's cave attracts an undue share of your attention. You can not go with them; and, moreover, you can not visit the cave again for any purpose whatever, until you have mastered the first section of your arithmetic,

containing all the tables. Here is the book, my child. Lessons are over for to-day; let us see how industrious you can be to-morrow."

But when the morrow came, Ida Chaloner's well-thumbed little arithmetic was found to be missing. The whole house was ransacked—"upstairs, down-stairs, and in the lady's chamber"—all without avail.

"Can not you think what you did with it, Ida?" Mr. Gresham asked.

But no; Ida was oblivious.

"Then," said the clergyman, "we must borrow Henry's book. It is a somewhat more advanced edition, but the tables are the same."

"I can not study if my book is gone," cried Ida, breathlessly.

"My dear child, there is more than one arithmetic in the world."

And Ida, flushed and indignant, was set down to study the obnoxious multiplication table out of Harry Tudor's text-book.

"Papa," cried Monty Gresham, that evening when he came in, "see what I found down in the trout-brook, jammed up among the big wet stones, and Ida's slipper stuck in the mud just beyond."

Ida Chaloner grew very red, and then colorless, as she bent lower over Harry Tudor's "Elementary Arithmetic."

Mr. Gresham took from Monty's hand the wet, muddy relics of the mysteriously rescued volume.

"Oh, Ida!" reproached Mrs. Gresham, "and that is what became of the slipper you said you had lost."

"Ida," said Mr. Gresham, gravely, "how can you explain this?"

Ida had no explanation to give. Quite silent, she listened to Mr. Gresham's reproofs and admonitions on the nature of falsehood.

"I hope," said the good man, severely, "your own conscience will reprove you sufficiently this time; but if the offense is repeated, I shall find myself compelled to punish you in a manner that you will not soon forget!"

Ida looked up at him with a strange, fluttered look—a look that spoke mingled wrath, defiance, and terror.

"Return to your lesson, Ida," he said, briefly. Somehow he felt like one who handles some strange, explosive fire-arm full of hidden danger.

But Ida dashed the muddy little arithmetic to the floor, and spurned it with her small, taper foot.

"I will never learn the multiplication table," she cried, in a choked voice; "I'll kill myself first."

Angie began to cry, Eleanor turned pale, while Jamie clung to her skirts, and the three boys looked on in ill-concealed trepidation.

"Go to your room, Ida," said Mr. Gresham.

Ida turned and obeyed, walking like a little queen.

Mrs. Gresham, urged thereto by a glance from her husband, followed the child upstairs, to try and soothe her excited mood.

But it was useless. Ida would neither speak nor look up.

"Let her alone," said Mr. Gresham, when his wife reported to him her entire lack of success. "She'll cool down before bed-time, I dare say—the rebellious little sprite! I am glad Eleanor and Angeline are not of such inflammable material."

But at night, when the little girls went to their room, carefully convoyed by Mrs. Gresham bearing a light, Ida Chaloner's tiny bed was empty and the room vacant.

"Dear me!" ejaculated Mrs. Gresham, "where can the child be gone? Perhaps to the study; she likes to sit there by the fire-light, when no one else is in the room."

But Ida was not in the study, nor in the play-room, nor yet sobbing out her griefs on the shoulder of her favorite ally, Monty Gresham. A search throughout the rectory grounds, extended even to Robinson Crusoe's Cave, proved equally futile. The matter began to grow serious.

"Do you know, Milo," said Mrs. Gresham to her husband, in a troubled whisper, "I think she has run away."

It was but the echo of a thought which had occurred to Mr. Gresham's own mind.

"But where could she run to?" he asked, uneasily.

"I hope she hasn't slipped into the river," exclaimed Mrs. Gresham, growing very pale. "It is very full after these November rains. Oh, Milo! what ought we to do?"

Not a member of the family, Jamie and Angeline excepted, slept that night, so great was the consternation and anxiety throughout the household; and with the earliest dawn of the gray autumnal morning, the search was resumed. Nobody knew, until this moment of doubt and vague terror, how dear the little foreign-born child had insensibly become to all of their hearts during the few brief weeks of her domestication among them.

"I shall never forgive myself if anything has happened to Ida," said Mr. Gresham.

"But nobody can say that you were to blame, Milo," urged his wife.

"I shall always say so myself," he returned, buttoning his overcoat, to renew the search.

Nightfall came once more, but with it no Ida, and to the little family at the rectory, gathered silently about their almost untasted evening meal, it seemed as if every corner of the room was full of mute reminders of the lost child. Her fairy-book lay on the window-ledge, open, as she had left it; her tiny handkerchief was on the lounge, and a bunch of wild asters she had brought in was slowly fading on the mantel, while the unlucky arithmetic, the cause of all her troubles, still lay on the floor where she had spurned it with her foot in the moment of her impetuous anger.

"Papa," whispered Angie, in a suppressed voice, "do you think Ida will come back to-morrow?"

"I hope so, child—I hope so!" returned her father, and then added, as if to himself, "God help me! I did not know I had grown to love the girl so dearly!"

Mrs. Gresham furtively wiped her eyes. She had no memory now for Ida's caprices or rebellion—she remembered only the child's affectionate ways and really loving heart.

"Don't talk so, Milo," she said, piteously. "One would think, by the way you speak, that the child was—dead."

The last word was uttered in a whisper, and Eleanor's hand tightened on her mother's.

"Oh, mamma, that can't be possible."

"Of course it can't; that's just what I say."

But they all started nervously when a loud and sudden knocking came to the door. Montmorenci jumped up to open it, but his father beckoned to him to sit still, and himself answered the summons.

A tall, heavily built man stood there, with long, swarthy hair and beard, and a skin bronzed by exposure to sun and storm to almost mulatto darkness.

"Is this here the Deepdale Rectory?" awkwardly twirling the brim of a ragged straw hat in his hands.

"It is!" Mr. Gresham answered, peering anxiously into the man's face.

"Well, then, p'r'aps you may have missed a black-eyed little gal, may be nine or ten years old—"

"Ida!" ejaculated Mrs. Gresham, breathlessly, springing to her husband's side.

"Let the man go on, my dear," said Mr. Gresham, striving to speak collectively. "What of her? Is she—"

"She's up to our place, seven miles beyond. I belong to Gypsy Ben's gang—we're making baskets up there, and doing a bit other work o' whiles."

"You are one of the gypsies?"

"Savin' your honor's presence, yes," answered the man, with a grin. "We've an ugly name given us; but we ain't so bad as we're called; and when she came here, as pretty and bold spoken as you please, wanting to live with us and make baskets by the fire, dear heart alive, says I, where's her friends? Well, it was a time before she'd let on, good or bad, about where she'd come from; but when she was a-settin' before the fire, warmin' of her poor little blistered feet, she said something 'bout Deepdale. So I come down to Deepdale and inquired—on the sly, mind you; for she vowed and declared she was going to stay 'long of us, always—for a little creetur, about her build and cut, and they told me at Howe's Tavern how you was all in trouble here. And you'd better send for her, sir, as soon as may be; for she ain't no more fit for our ways o' life than if she was the queen's eldest darter!"

Mr. Gresham wrung the man's hard hand, and thanked him in broken syllables, while his wife ran to get the slender little family purse.

But the basket-maker turned away when he saw what her intention was.

"Lord love you, ma'am," he said, "I don't want no reward. We couldn't do nothin' with the little chick if we was to keep her; and I've children of my own—not livin', ma'am; but it makes me kind o' soft-hearted toward children when I see 'em lonely like and bewildered. So if the parson'll get his hat and come with me, we won't be losing any more time."

While Nat, the gypsy, and the Reverend Milo Gresham were plodding side by side through the rustling drifts of dead leaves that choked the woodland paths, by the light of a solitary lantern that gleamed athwart the autumnal darkness like a red-eyed will-o'-the-wisp, little Ida Chaloner sat before the great fire that blazed in the center of the gypsy encampment, her dark eyes fixed steadfastly on the flames, and her head drooping slightly. Close beside her a wrinkled old woman was sitting by the fire, while various dark forms passed and repassed her on their way to and from the coarse board shanties that were temporarily erected in the woods. One or two wild-looking children crouched opposite, watching her as rabbits watch

the casual passer-by from their lurking places in the forest, with shy, wild eyes. Ida was not altogether certain that she had done a wise thing in joining the gypsies. Somehow, they did not seem like the jovial, romantic race that she had read about in picture-books. They were dirtier, more hard-working, and infinitely more commonplace than she had expected to find them, and, moreover, they neither told fortunes nor played on mandolins, like the gypsies in Spanish pictures, nor was there a red cloak in the whole gang of them.

Ida wondered what they would say if she were to propose seceding from them—and yet she was very loath to go back to the rectory and confess how wrong and foolish she had been. The multiplication table was very bad, but, after all, this sort of thing was worse!

"What is my pretty little lady thinking about?" croaked the withered old woman, resting her chin on her hands, and her elbows on her knees, as Ida chanced to meet her red unwinking eyes.

"I—I was wondering why you never told fortunes nowadays," said the child, coloring.

"Basket-making pays better," chuckled the woman, "except when we're close to the great cities. Would you like to sell flowers in the summer-time? We would dress you up and send you out with old Lije as his granddaughter—it wouldn't be a bad spec. He's so old and black, and you're so young and pretty. Would you like it?"

"No," said Ida, promptly.

"Oh, yes, you would," said the old woman, bending over to throw a fresh stick into the blazing heart of the fire. "And—honey, dear—"

"Well?"

"It's not the gay gold necklace you'll be wearin' when you're sellin' flowers at the races; 'twouldn't be proper, ye know—would ye mind givin' it to a poor old woman like me, as has buried three grandchildren?"

An instantaneous refusal was trembling on Ida's lips, but as she looked up and met the glare of greedy desire in the old woman's bleared eyes, the words died away unuttered on her lips, and she did not even venture to speak the remonstrances that rose to her lips as the crooked yellow fingers of the old hag fumbled about her neck, loosing the gold clasps, and removing the string of glittering beads.

"I'll keep 'em for you careful," croaked the woman, her whole face aglow with covetous delight. "And the brasslets, dear—the heavy brasslets; you'll not be wanting to keep 'em

now! Sure what use would they be to you? Give 'em to me —quick, quick!"

She extended her hand, at the same time turning her head over her left shoulder to listen, with animal quickness of apprehension, for far-off footsteps, whose sound she had caught. The next minute, before Ida could find words to express her vehement disapprobation of this sort of thing, the bracelet had been twisted from her arm, and hidden somewhere in the tattered folds of the old woman's wretched dress.

"Don't let on a word, or I'll murder ye!" she muttered hoarsely in Ida's ear; and then sitting back to her former post among the withered leaves, she resumed her monotonous song, rocking back and forth by way of marking the time.

A minute or two afterward, Nat, the gypsy, strode up the narrow path, with Mr. Gresham following close behind.

"Is it yerself, Nat?" cried the old woman, with well-acted surprise; "and who would have thought of seein' ye back so quick, intirely? It's you has the feet of swiftness, as yer father, rest his soul in glory, had before you! And who's this with ye, Nat; a stranger?"

"Stand out of the way, Mother Jude," said Nat, indifferently. "This is the little gal, sir."

The moment the fire-light shone on Mr. Gresham's pale and agitated face, Ida sprung to her feet, and, with a low cry, ran into his outstretched arms.

"Oh, Mr. Gresham! Mr. Gresham!" she cried, nestling her head on his shoulder, "I am so glad."

"Ida! my darling!" he muttered, almost inaudibly; "my little lost lamb!"

Gypsy Nat stood by, silently watching them, his quick eye roving restlessly from one to the other. Presently he made one stride across the firelit area, and took Mother Jude fiercely by the throat.

"Give back those things!" he ejaculated, in a voice of smothered passion. "Give them back, you Jezebel!"

"What things, Natty dear?" gasped the half-choked old woman. "Sure I don't know what you're talkin' about. Leave go, or there'll be no life left in my wind-pi—i—i—pe."

Her speech ended in a strangled squeal.

"Isn't it enough to be vagabonds without being thieves?" he demanded, fiercely. "Give them back, I say."

The old woman still demurred, but her purple face and staring eyes bore witness to the energy of the gypsy's grasp. With a sudden motion of her left hand she tossed the glittering, golden trinkets at Nat's head.

"Take 'em," she screamed, "and bad luck to you for a black-hearted villain, that grudges the very breath o' life to your poor old aunt!"

Quite heedless of Mother Jude's vituperations, Gypsy Nat stooped to pick up the jewels; and when Ida came to bid him good-bye a minute or two afterward, he slipped them quietly into her hand.

"You'll remember the gypsies, child, that they ain't so bad as folks like to believe," was his parting word.

Great was the rejoicing when Ida Chaloner was once more brought into the midst of her little family circle at Deepdale Rectory, and many marvelous tales the child had to tell of her brief sojourn among the wandering children of Egypt. There really seemed no opportunity for the moral lesson which good Mrs. Gresham was so anxious to inculcate.

"But, Ida," she said, finally, as she bent over the tired child's pillow, before she left her for the night, "you will never run away again?"

Ida shook her head.

"It wasn't nice," she said. "They are so dirty, and their clothes smelled so like poor men's houses."

"And you will promise never to run away again?" persisted Mrs. Gresham.

"I'll never run to the gypsies, anyhow," said Ida, sleepily.

And that was all the pledge the clergyman's wife could exact from her charge.

"We hadn't better press the matter, my dear," was the Reverend Milo's verdict, when his wife laid the matter before him. "Ida is peculiar—very; and perhaps we had best leave matters as they are!"

And to the day of her death, Ida Chaloner remained in hopeless ignorance of the multiplication table.

CHAPTER VII.

CHILD OR WOMAN?

THE snows and sunshines of five years had passed away since the dreary November night when little Ida Chaloner sat among the gypsies in the fire-illumined woods, and every year had left its not unfavorable impress upon her brow. It was hardly to be wondered at that she had changed so as to be scarcely recognizable during that time.

Her home was still at Deepdale Rectory, although the sum of money advanced for her by the unfortunate man who had come to so sudden and tragic an end was long since exhausted,

and she was now, so to speak, a pensioner on the charity of the Reverend Milo Gresham. But she never felt it so. To her the Reverend Milo and his gentle little wife were like the father and mother raised up to her loneliness; and she had no more idea of obligation toward them than had Eleanor or Angie.

"Why, they *love* me!" she would have made answer, innocently, if any one had broached the subject, as if love were the universal leveler of all distinctions.

Nor would Mr. and Mrs. Gresham willingly have spoken a word to break the sweet illusion.

"God has been very good to us," said the Reverend Milo, "and it would be the grossest ingratitude to shrink from the maintenance of the friendless orphan He has intrusted to our care."

"Yes, to be sure," assented Mrs. Gresham; "and who could have the heart to grudge the poor child a bit of bread, and a dress now and then! I am sure the girls love her as if she were a sister, and she's like a sunbeam about the house."

"Like a streak of lightning too, sometimes," dryly added Mr. Gresham. "Well, well, we can't be all alike; but I do sometimes wish she had some of Eleanor's self-poise and evenness of disposition."

"Yes," said his wife, meditatively; "she puzzles me. She's a child, playing hoop with Angie, and then she's a woman when the older pupils are here. Milo, my love, don't you think that, for the present, while Ida is so beautiful and ignorant of the world, you had better take only small boys? I really was a little uneasy when she cried so at Percy Hardacre's leaving. It's absurd to talk about a child of fifteen having a heart—in a sentimental sort of way, you know; and yet I did almost fancy her heart was touched, until I found her sitting on the floor playing at tea-party with Angie's china tea-set, and fighting the boys who should feed the Java sparrows that little Melville Cross left here."

Mr. Gresham laughed.

"My dear Selina," he said, "we mustn't fret ourselves unnecessarily about such things. They'll all regulate themselves in time."

"When is Geoffrey going away to commence that civil engineering engagement?" asked Mrs. Gresham after a moment or two of thoughtful silence.

"Next week, I suppose."

"Has he said anything to Eleanor yet?"

"No—not that I know of. Why, Selina," added Mr. Gresham, with a shrewd sparkle in his tranquil blue eyes, "I never supposed it possible for you to become such a downright match-maker."

Mrs. Gresham drew herself up.

"Match-maker! That is hardly a just expression, Milo, to use concerning a thing which has been settled since they were old enough to think of such things. I *know* Eleanor likes him; that is, if I am woman enough to read the expression of her face, and I am sure he has talked to me time and again of what he intended to do when he had got far enough ahead in the world to marry Eleanor. They have been fond of one another since they were children."

"Geoffrey is a good lad," said Mr. Gresham, mildly; "a very good lad, and is likely, for all that I can see, to succeed very well in the world. And if Eleanor is really fond of him—"

"There!" cried Mrs. Gresham, laughing, "who is the match-maker now?"

"I was only deducing the inferences from your own premises, my love," said the Reverend Milo Gresham, a little discomfited, as he turned to his books. "If you are going past the study-room, tell the boys I am ready for the second Latin division."

For Mr. Gresham had his own little library now, separate and apart from the hum and tumult of the twelve boys who formed his school. Mrs. Gresham, putting her blue cap ribbons into the noisy purlieus of the "study-room," duly notified the "second Latin division" of their preceptor's readiness, and then, leaning her elbows on the hall windows, looked with a half smile down on the little group gathered under the spreading branches of a gnarled old apple-tree on the grass below.

"How foolish I am to fret myself about Ida," she thought. "She *is* a child—nothing in the world but a child."

Ida Chaloner was sitting on the grass, her silky black curls tied back with a crimson ribbon, so that her exquisite profile, pure and correct as an Italian cameo, was in no way marred, and the flush of health and happiness on her cheek. At fifteen, she was as beautiful as Hebe's self, with melting eyes, long, dark lashes, dewy red lips, and a complexion like the palest pink velvet; and her dress, although of the commonest buff calico, seemed to adjust itself to her slender, supple figure as the drapery falls round the perfect outlines of a Greek Venus. The gold necklace still encircled her cream-white

throat, and on her round, dimpled arms flashed the aureate shine of the bracelets which old Mother Jude of the gypsy camp had so nearly contrived to confiscate. Little Angie, plump and "little" still, though she had entered her tenth year—was sitting so close to her, that Ida's curls touched the gold-brown hair of the fair, Saxon-like child, and the two were in deep conclave over the merits of two well-worn rag dolls.

"No, Angie," said Ida, gravely; "on the whole, I won't exchange. Marguerite isn't so pretty as Jane Ann, but I like her better. I've had her longer, you know. I'll keep Marguerite. I can easily sew on a new wig of curls and put a patch over her nose; and that blue silk dress that I made out of Jonas Cameron's cravat *does* fit her so prettily. And I say, Angie, I'll help you to make up the lace for Jane Ann's half-dress, if you'll curl Marguerite's hair over a pipe-stem?"

"Well," assented Angie, in a note of the sunniest content, as she looked round for the toilet implements of the doll lady.

Eleanor Gresham, seated in the shade, with her blue muslin dress falling picturesquely over the arm of a rustic garden-chair (Geoffrey Moreland's work), looked up with a smile. She had grown into comely maidenhood, like some fair garden flower, and the smile lent softened beauty to her delicate oval face, as she turned it toward the other two girls.

"Ida," she said, "one would think you were a child."

"I *am* a child," returned Ida, gravely, surveying the array of silk and cotton scraps spread out on the grass. "At least I love dearly to play with the dolls; and Mrs. Gresham hasn't made my dresses as long as yours. I suppose I sha'n't be a young lady until I have trailing dresses."

"Does that constitute the dividing line between childhood and womanhood?" laughed Eleanor.

"Why, yes—doesn't it? But I mean to play with dolls always."

"After you are married?" hazarded Angie.

"Who is talking about being married?" said Ida. "I say, Angie, give me a bit of your blue neck-ribbon—it is just what Marguerite wants to match her complexion."

Mrs. Gresham, who had been taking note of this little scene with inward amusement, now interfered, her voice sounding gently downward through the apple boughs:

"Ida, my child, it is the hour for your piano practice."

"Oh, Mrs. Gresham," pleaded Ida, "can't I stay out just ten minutes longer with Angie and the dolls?"

"Not if you want to go up the mountain trout-fishing with James and Monty; they start at four, and it is three already."

"Oh, to be sure," said Ida, springing to her feet, with a backward toss of the ribbon-tied curls, "I wouldn't miss the trout-fishing for a sixpence. I'll be up to practice directly. Which is it to be? the 'Cujus Animam,' or the 'Cloches de Monastere?' Say the 'Cujus,' please—that is the easier."

"I am not certain, Ida," said Mrs. Gresham, "that I am doing right to allow you to go on such long rambles with the boys. It is not exactly lady-like, and you are growing so tall now that—"

But all further remonstration on the good lady's part was cut short by the well-directed aim of a handful of apple-blossoms, thrown up at her by Ida Chaloner's own practiced hand as that young damsel slipped into the house with a laugh.

How lovely she looked in the green light that glimmered through the vine-shaded windows of the small apartment that Mrs. Gresham loftily called the "music-room," because a spindle-legged piano, an invalid guitar, and two accordions belonging to some of the pupils were kept there. Her cheeks were slightly flushed as she bent forward, and her long, slim fingers, slipping from chord to chord, seemed to move with a slow, graceful magic, while the drooping lashes of her eyes nearly swept her cheeks, while Eleanor, stitching away under the green boughs of the apple-trees all alone—for Angie had gone in with her dolls—listened to the grand melodies of the "Cujus Animam," and wondered where Geoffrey Moreland could possibly be.

"He is going away so soon," she thought, "that surely he should give me all the time he has to spare. Oh, if he were only stationed somewhere nearer here—but I ought not to complain, since he is so well started in his profession, and—"

But here Mrs. Gresham broke the thread of her daughter's reverie by appearing on the piazza behind her.

"Where is Geoffrey, Eleanor?" she asked.

"I don't know, mamma."

"He is not with your father. I supposed, of course, he was here."

"Why 'of course,' mamma?" asked Eleanor, coloring a little, yet smiling the while.

"Where else should he be but with you?" demanded Mrs. Gresham, somewhat tartly.

"Mamma, you forget that no more of an engagement has ever been spoken between us?" pleaded the girl.

"That makes no difference: everybody knows that it's a settled thing, as soon as ever Geoffrey is able to support a

wife. But I really think there ought to be some more formal understanding between you before he goes away."

"There will be, I do not doubt," was the answer that rose to Eleanor's lips, but she did not syllable it in words; somehow she felt that it was scarce befitting the maidenly reserve of her shy nature. Confident as she herself was of her cousin's love, she did not like to express that confidence, even to so dear a friend as her mother.

"It will be all right, I am sure, mamma," she said, gently, stooping to recover the little silver thimble which had rolled away in the grass at her feet. "The Bible says, you know, that 'perfect love casteth out all fears:' and I think it casts out all doubt and distrust, too."

So Mrs. Gresham went on down to the garden to gather fresh lettuce for the evening dish of cool, crisp salad, and Eleanor remained under the moving canopy of the apple boughs, singing softly to herself, and thinking of a thousand sweet, intangible subjects, such as swarm unbidden into the fancy of an innocent girl of seventeen, whose heart had somehow vanished out of her own keeping.

But through it all the troublesome question would recur again and again:

"Where is Geoffrey? Why don't he come to share these precious moments with me?"

CHAPTER VIII.

GEOFFREY MORELAND'S LOVE.

IDA CHALONER had a fashion of throwing herself, soul and spirit, entirely into whatever occupation or amusement chanced to be the chosen one of the hour, and she was wrapped up in the soul-subduing harmonies of Rossini's grand masterpiece, her eyes shining softly, and her flexible fingers, as it were, electrified, when the door opened softly behind her. She never turned her head. Probably it was one of the boys come after his accordion, or Angie in search of one of her books or playthings; but the footsteps, instead of receding from the apartment once more, as she had supposed would be the case, advanced; nor were they those of school-boy or child.

Still Ida went on with her practicing, until the new-comer paused at her side, and then looking up with a sort of impatience, she met the clear, hazel eyes of Geoffrey Moreland.

He had grown into a tall, noble-looking young man, with a broad, square forehead, overhung with straight brown locks, and a Napoleonic mouth and chin. Truly, Eleanor Gresham

had no cause to be ashamed of her lover; for, although scarcely reaching the Rubicon of twenty-one, Geoffrey Moreland was thoroughly a man in every sense of the word.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Geoff?" she said, carelessly. "Where's the use of interrupting me just now, when I'm so busy?"

"Am I interrupting you, Ida?"

"Don't you see that you are?" she returned, with a laugh.

"At all events," he said, in a tone which seemed to her full of undue mortification, "I shall not be here to interrupt you long."

"That is true," said Ida, a little soberly. "Oh, Geoff, I shall be sorry when you are gone."

"Ida—shall you really?"

"Of course I shall. You'll write to Eleanor, won't you?" she asked, eagerly.

Geoffrey Moreland bit his lip.

"I am not sure whether I shall or not."

"To be sure you will. Oh! I wish I were a man to go out into the world and make my fortune."

"A man's fate is not necessarily fortunate."

"I would make it so, if I were a man," said Ida, with sparkling eyes. "Now, Geoff, do go off somewhere, and do something, and let me finish my practicing, or I shall be too late to go with Monty and Jamie up the mountain after trout."

But Geoffrey Moreland, instead of taking this exceedingly plain hint, still stood leaning on the piano, nervously handling the music sheets which lay piled on its end. As Ida lifted her lovely liquid eyes to his, he sat down opposite to her in a cushioned easy-chair.

"Ida," he said, "come here. I have something to say to you."

She descended from the piano-stool and came to him, like an innocent little school-girl, standing before him with folded hands.

"Ida," he pursued, "you said you would be sorry to lose me. Oh! Ida, if you could but know how cruelly hard it will be for me to lose *you*."

"Yes, of course," said Ida, wondering at the energy of expression with which he spoke; "we have been together for so long, you know, Geoff."

"It is not that, Ida," he ejaculated, almost passionately. "You will not understand me! I mean that if I lose you, I lose all that makes life endurable for me. Ida, I love you!"

"Me, Geoff!" she said, in a sort of vague, child-like won-

der—and then, as if her eyes had been suddenly opened, a deep crimson stole over her cheeks, and a shy smile dimpled her lips. "But I thought Eleanor—"

"Eleanor!" he echoed, impatiently; "Eleanor—what is she to me? A dear cousin—the childish fancy of a boyhood I have long since outgrown—a cold, pulseless statue, correct and chill, as if she were carved in marble! There is life, and glow, and passion about you, Ida, and I love you—ay, by Heaven! better than my own existence. Speak to me, dearest; tell me that you will one day be my wife! Let my heart have at least one morsel of hope to feed upon. Why do you not speak?" he reiterated, almost wildly, while his pale cheek glowed almost into sudden flame, and his lip quivered almost convulsively.

Ida still stood in the unconsciously graceful position which set off her dark, Spanish style so well, her hands clasped in one another, and the lashes drooping low over her flushed velvet cheeks.

"Geoff," she said, slowly, "all this is nonsense. You know very well I don't care for you, except as I care for Monty and James, and all the rest of them—"

"But, in time, Ida—"

"Time will never change my sentiments, Geoffrey. I am only a child now, but one day I suppose I shall be a woman, and the man I marry will never be like you."

He bowed his face on his hands with a low groan.

"Don't be a goose," said Ida, superciliously. "Eleanor is worth a dozen of me, and to Eleanor you are the one *preux chevalier* of the world. Now listen to me. I'll not tell her of this fool's fancy of yours; don't frown at me, Geoff. You know I never was afraid of you, and one of these days you will come back to your reason and common sense."

"Ida," cried the young man, passionately, "what are you made of?"

"I don't know," she laughed; "sugar and spice, I suppose, and all that's nice. That's what little girls are made of."

"Have you no feelings?"

"Yes, lots of 'em. I feel very much surprised to think what a goose Geoffrey Moreland is, and very much pleased I've had an offer of marriage at fifteen, and very much disgusted that any man can be so idiotic as to prefer me to a human pearl like Eleanor Gresham. Why, look you," she added, with a sweet, vivacious laugh, "half an hour ago I was dressing dolls with Angie out on the grass, and here I am

elevated to what Mamma Gresham calls the highest destiny of womanhood. It's too comical for anything."

And she laughed again, clasping her white, perfect hands above her head, and looking, Geoffrey Moreland thought, more bewitchingly lovely than ever.

"Ida," he said, reproachfully, "is this all you have to say to me?"

"Yes, every bit. I am tired of the sight of you now. Go off, Geoffrey, and let me finish my practicing. I'm afraid I shall be too late for the trout-party now, all through your nonsense."

And Ida Chaloner sat calmly down to the spindle-legged little piano, and arranged the sheets of music over again, while Geoffrey, rising slowly and sadly to his feet, left the room, his head drooping on his breast and the deepest shadow of despair upon every lineament of his face. To Ida Chaloner it might be very great "fun," but to him it was little less than death, he told himself.

And Eleanor, sitting at her work where the afternoon sun laid bars of quivering gold on the short grass, and the shadow of the apple blossoms moved to and fro, saw him pass the garden gate, and go out into the road, his arms folded, and his head still hanging low on his breast, while a slight pang of disappointment rent her heart.

"I wonder where Geoffrey is going?" she thought. "He must surely have seen me here. But I must not be foolish; doubtless he has other things to occupy his mind than a foolish girl's love."

Geoffrey Moreland was strangely sad and changed during the brief week that remained of his stay at Deepdale Rectory. All the buoyant heart and merriment seemed to have passed out of him; he appeared alike indifferent to past, present, and future.

"Geoff is so strange," remonstrated the indignant Monty; "a fellow can't so much as speak to him without being snubbed! He is too uppish for anything!"

"Hush! Monty!" responded his gentle sister Eleanor, her own heavy eyelids and pale cheeks bearing witness to her silent appreciation of the change. "Geoffrey is very busy, and you must not speak of him in that way."

"The boy has something on his mind," was the Reverend Milo Gresham's internal conclusion. "He can't possibly have been getting into debt! But, perhaps, I had better have a talk with him."

And so, when a fitting opportunity presented itself, the good clergyman broached the subject to Geoffrey Moreland.

"My boy," he said, kindly, "are you quite certain that you have told me all that is in your heart?"

"I don't know what you mean, uncle," said Geoffrey, shortly.

"Lately I have fancied that there was some concealed oppression weighing you down," explained Mr. Gresham, a little confused that his frank candor should not be met in the same spirit. "And if there should be any unpaid debt or obligation which makes you uncomfortable, I hope you will confide in me; and perhaps we two together can work out the business."

Geoffrey pressed his uncle's hand.

"My dear sir," he said, "believe me, there is nothing of the sort which need give your kind heart pain. I—I suppose I am a little low at leaving home for so long. It's quite natural, you know."

"Yes, it is," said the Reverend Milo, quite relieved at Geoffrey's words. He told his wife, exultantly, that it was "all right," but Mrs. Gresham did not believe it.

"I know better," quoth the good lady. She and her husband, with Eleanor and Ida, walked to the railway depot with Geoffrey Moreland the morning that he started on his first entrance into the world of business and professional endeavor. Eleanor was pale and quiet, and said but little; but Ida, her beautiful young face shadowed by a broad hat with pink ribbons floating away from it, was full of exuberant glee, sometimes running on in advance, with Jowler, the big Newfoundland dog, sometimes hanging back to gather wild flowers along the country road, or to peep into the nest of some bird, deeply hidden in the hedge-rows.

Mrs. Gresham watched her nephew in puzzled silence, as he walked mutely along by Eleanor's side. Just before they reached the little platform, she beckoned her daughter aside.

"Eleanor," she whispered, "has he said anything to you about—about an engagement?"

"Mamma!"

The blood rushed readily to the young girl's transparent forehead.

"Answer, my dear—yes, or no!" insisted Mrs. Gresham, laying her hand impressively on her daughter's arm.

"No, mamma," answered Eleanor, almost inaudibly, her head hanging down, and her eyes suffused with tears, which

had their source half in mortification and half in wounded love.

Mrs. Gresham walked forward to Geoffrey, and slipped her arm through his. She was determined to solve the mystery of this problem.

"Geoffrey," she said, gravely, "what does it all mean?"

"What does all what mean, aunt?" he demanded, a little brusquely.

"Your changed manner—your strange avoidance of the topics which were once most interesting to you—your sudden alienation from Eleanor. Have you ceased to love her?"

"Mamma!" pleaded poor Eleanor, in an agony of shame, as she hid her burning face on Ida's shoulder.

"Geoffrey," went on Mrs. Gresham, heedless of her daughter's voice of entreaty, "I insist upon an explanation!"

"You are very easily obeyed, madame," said Geoffrey, turning pale and collected to the little group which surrounded him. "Yes, there is no use in further disguising the matter. I *am* changed, altered—alienated, if you will, and the secret is that I love with my whole heart, not Eleanor, but Ida Chaloner, and shall continue to love her, and her only, until my life's end!"

And with a bitterly courteous bow he swung himself on to the platform of the train, now "slacking up" in front of the simple little country station, and the next minute was whirled away from them.

The dismay which his parting words had infused into the little group can be more easily imagined than described. Mr. and Mrs. Gresham stared at each other as if they could hardly credit the evidence of their senses.

Eleanor lifted her head from Ida's shoulder as if to shrink back from her, but the young girl clasped her arms yet more tightly round Eleanor's waist.

"Darling Eleanor," she cried, speaking eagerly and impetuously, "it was not my fault—indeed, indeed it was not. I was more surprised than you can be when he first told me that—that he loved me. I don't believe he does, Eleanor—it's only a fancy that will die out in time. He loves you really, and you alone. Eleanor, I could not help it. You will not be angry with me?"

Eleanor lifted her heavy eyes to Ida's beautiful eager face.

"How can I be, Ida?" she asked, sadly. "Yes, I know you are more lovely than I, and it is not strange that he should admire you; but—but I did love him so dearly. Ida, Ida, shall I ever be happy again?"

And the burst of tears which followed relieved the overcharged heart, as the summer rain refreshes the parched landscape of August—while Ida, still clasping the slender, drooping form to her heart, murmured sweet, unintelligible words to her, like the mother soothing her infant.

Yes, Ida was forgiven her unconscious fault. Eleanor was too just and generous to attach blame where it was not rightly due; but Mrs. Gresham could not lightly overlook the cause of her daughter's troubles.

"I knew she was growing too pretty," said Mrs. Gresham, as she sat beside Eleanor in the twilight of the summer evening; "but I did not—no, I could not suppose that our Geoffrey's heart would be the first target she would aim at."

"Mamma," said Eleanor, who sat by the open door-way, through which the door-yard was visible, "look there."

She pointed with her forefinger, from which, as Mrs. Gresham had observed, she had removed the ring which Geoffrey Moreland had placed there long ago. Mrs. Gresham came to her side, and with her eye followed the direction indicated by the slender finger.

There sat Ida on the stone-flagged walk, with Angie leaning over her shoulder, and both children—for children they were, to all intents and purposes—absorbed in the frolics of a family of small gray kittens, while Ida's sweet laughter mingled with Angie's shrill, childish tones of merriment.

"Mamma," said Eleanor, in accents of gentle reproach, "never say that again about Ida. *She* aiming at anybody's heart! Why, she is a child like Angie—only fifteen years old!"

"She is a born coquette, nevertheless," said Mrs. Gresham.

"But she has never yet felt her powers," insisted Eleanor.

"Did you ever notice what a way she has of using her eyes—glancing up, and then down again, and letting the lids droop half-way over them? Why, there isn't a man living who could resist that little motion; it says as plain as so many words, 'Come, flirt with me.'"

"It is quite unstudied, mother; she has had that trick ever since she first came here, a child of ten years old; I think it was born with her."

"I don't like it," persisted Mrs. Gresham. "I shall always feel uneasy about the pupils now, if they are old enough to care for anything besides bats and balls."

"Mamma, Ida means no harm."

"A woman can't help making mischief," asserted Mrs. Gresham, impatiently; "particularly a beautiful woman—

and that's what our Ida is going to be. It began with Eve, and I suppose it will go on until the world's end."

"But you are unreasonable, mamma. How can Ida help being beautiful?"

"You are determined to take that child's part, Eleanor."

"Because I think she does not deserve any blame in this particular instance, mamma. Do not suppose that I do not feel this thing," Eleanor added, in a voice so strangely mournful that it pierced like a knife to the mother's heart; "it has blighted the current of my whole life, but I feel I must not blame Ida unjustly."

Mrs. Gresham stooped to press her lips to her daughter's cheek, and then went away with her eyes full of tears.

"Geoffrey will discover his mistake one day," she thought to herself, "and he will come back to claim the heart he now throws aside, dazzled by the shine of Ida Chaloner's beautiful eyes. Then, perhaps, it will be too late!"

Mrs. Gresham had never abandoned her old custom of visiting her children's apartment the last thing before retiring herself to rest, and that night she was relieved to find Eleanor sweetly sleeping, though with the traces of tears yet upon her long brown eyelashes, and a cheek as white as the white roses in the garden border without; while Ida, with one cheek pillowed on her hand, and the softest carmine glowing beneath her transparent skin, held beneath the other arm something clasped tightly to her bosom. Mrs. Gresham softly lifted the counterpane to ascertain what it might be—it was Marguerite, the doll!

"Eleanor was right—she is nothing but a child, after all," thought Mrs. Gresham. And when she went away, the shadow of a soft forgiving kiss was upon Ida Chaloner's crimson cheek.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST KISS.

"PAPA, I think he is the nicest pupil you ever had!" cried Angie Gresham one evening, as she climbed joyfully into her father's lap. "He mended the china sugar-bowl in the tea-set so beautifully, and he says he will teach me how to ride on his pony, Ali Baba!"

"Whom are you talking about?" said Ida Chaloner, who had just returned from a week's visit to some young girl of the neighborhood. "Who is it that is so nice, and mends broken china, and gives lessons in equestrian exercises?"

"Why," cried Angie, gleefully, "it's papa's new pupil, Rex Delamere."

"Angeline," reproved her mother, looking up from the basket of stockings she was engaged in repairing.

"Mr. Reginald, then," said Angie, a little subdued; "but he told me to call him Rex."

"And pray," interposed Ida, "who is Rex, or—Reginald, or whatever his name may be? Tell me about him, Eleanor."

"He is a young gentleman—"

"A boy, my dear," said Mrs. Gresham. "Papa doesn't like you to magnify his pupils into anything but the children they are."

"He told me he was in his nineteenth year, mamma."

"Well, my dear, what's that but a boy? To be sure, I wish your papa would refuse to receive any one over sixteen; but as this one came all the way from the West Indies, and really seemed to know of no other place where he can be perfected in the higher mathematics and ancient languages and still enjoy the privileges of a home, I don't see that we could very well close our doors against him."

"His guardian proffers a most liberal remuneration as well," added Mr. Gresham, "and he himself seems a fine, frank-hearted young fellow."

"Will he stay long?" asked Ida, indifferently.

"Six months, at the end of which time his guardian, Mr. Raynsford, wishes to take him the tour of Europe."

"He's as rich as Crœsus," interrupted Monty Gresham, who was leaning over the back of Ida's chair. "He's got no end of an allowance, and wears his shirt buttoned with diamonds as big as hazel-nuts."

"Monty," remonstrated Eleanor, "you're getting into such a way of exaggeration lately!"

"Well, they're as large as a small pea, any way!" said Monty, somewhat discomfited. "He's a generous fellow, too, and gave me a diamond ring, but papa made me give it back. There's none of the milksop about him, if he is a creole!"

"Montmorenci, don't talk so," said Mr. Gresham. "He is no more a creole than yourself; and I am at a loss to know your meaning when you use the expression 'milksop.'"

"It means a chap that hasn't got any starch about him, papa—a Miss Nancy."

"When will you learn to express yourself more euphoniously, my son?" sighed the Reverend Mr. Gresham.

"And he keeps his pony over to the Deepdale Tavern stables — such a spanking trotter as it is!" cried Jamie.

"Papa, it can do a mile in two-forty easily, without once breaking!"

"I dare say," said Mr. Gresham, ironically. "I am almost sorry about the pony, but the boy seems so attached to it. It seems he brought it from Cuba with him."

Ida, who had long since ceased to be at all interested in the peculiarities of the new pupil, was cutting out a new style of paper doll for Angie's special edification, carrying on a whispered conversation with her the while, when the door opened and the new pupil himself appeared.

Reginald Delamere was tall and well-shaped, with dark-blue eyes, hair so darkly brown that it was almost black, and a smooth, sunburned face, with a deep dimple on the chin—a handsome, frank-looking young fellow, who looked as near twenty-one as he did eighteen. His dress—a stylish demi-toilet, having the stamp of metropolitan make and fit—contrasted singularly with the costume of those surrounding him, and there was something graceful and well-born in the very motion of his head as he glanced in some surprise around the room.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said to Mr. Gresham, "I was not aware you were with company."

"Neither am I, Reginald," said Mr. Gresham, smiling pleasantly. "There are no strangers here—this is Ida Chaloner, one of our own family, who has been temporarily absent; Ida, shake hands with the new pupil."

Ida, whose right hand was occupied with a pair of scissors and several sheets of gayly colored tissue paper, extended her left without turning her head.

"How do you do?" said Ida. "Take care—you are stepping on the doll's fringed shawl."

Reginald Delamere looked at the young girl as if he were not quite certain where, in the scale of femininity, he might class her.

Angie had told him about Ida, and he had drawn a picture of her in his mind as a romping school-girl of ten or eleven—and this exquisitely beautiful young creature with the shy, gazelle-like eyes of a woman, and the habits and occupation of a child, puzzled him in no common degree.

So completely bewildered was he that he might have stood staring at her for fifteen minutes or so longer if Mr. Gresham had not considerately come to his aid.

"I think you were wishing to ask me some question, Reginald?" he said, good-naturedly.

"Yes, sir," answered the new pupil, in some confusion.

"Plane, the carpenter, says he could very easily put up a board stable for Ali Baba, at the end of your hennery, that would answer, at least, until the cold weather—that is, if you had no objection. The cost would be a mere trifle."

"And what may be your idea of a mere trifle, Reginald?"

"Fifty dollars, sir."

"I call fifty dollars a pretty good sum, my boy," said the clergyman, mildly; "but do as you choose, I have no objection."

"Then Plane shall come out to see about it to-morrow?"

"As you please—only remember, Reginald, that Ali Baba must not interfere with Xenophon and Euripides."

"He shall not, sir. Angie, the pony is tied outside; will you come and take your first lesson?"

Angie dropped her paper dolls, and ran joyfully for her sunbonnet, while Ida, coming over to Eleanor's side of the room, began to tell her some particulars of her visit, with her head in Eleanor's lap, and her lovely eyes looking eagerly up into the sad blue orbs of the other.

She had forgotten the new pupil as completely as if he had never existed; but he had not forgotten her!

Throughout the whole of the riding lesson, Reginald Delamere's mind was reverting to the *tableau vivant* he had just witnessed in Mrs. Gresham's homely little sitting-room—the girl with eyes that reminded him of old Spanish portraits he had seen as a child, skin like velvet, and hair so black that it caught a purplish gloss in the light—the girl whose attitudes were a series of unconscious pictures, and whose voice was full of musical cadences. Mr. Gresham had called Reginald Delamere a boy, but he was not a boy. The good clergyman had made no allowances for the tropical climate in which he had grown up—a climate which develops mind and body, as the crystal-domed roof of a hot-house develops vegetation into premature bloom and maturity. Reginald Delamere was in his nineteenth year and had left boyhood far behind him—and here was where the Reverend Milo Gresham made his mistake.

Reginald Delamere was still, as it were, under the influence of this spell several days subsequently, when, trotting along through the woods, about a mile from the rectory, on Ali Baba, he overtook Ida Chaloner, who, up to this time, had vouchsafed him very little of her company.

She was walking, with a languid, elastic grace, along the footpath, a Shetland shawl thrown over her well-formed shoulders, and her dress, of coarse calico, quite short enough to display feet that were almost slender and small enough to

wear Cinderella's magic slippers. She wore no covering on her head, but a straw hat, hanging by its ribbon over her left arm, was ready to do its office when she had got beyond the friendly green awning of the woods; and the exercise of walking had given an exquisite crimson to her cheek, while her eyes sparkled like tiny pools of dark water, with stars hidden in their depths, from under the long fringe of lashes that nearly veiled them. Reginald looked at her with the admiring adoration which devout Catholics accord to their saints. To him she was a living picture—a moving poem.

At the same moment, attracted by the muffled sound of the horse's feet on the mossy path, she turned her head and smiled.

Reginald sprung from his horse, and throwing the bridle-rein on his left arm, came to her side.

"I may walk the rest of the way with you, Miss Chaloner?"

"Yes, if you prefer walking to riding on such a hot day as this."

"I might not, other things being equal, but—"

"Oh!" said Ida, dryly, "a compliment is intended, I suppose?"

"Not a compliment—only the truth. Truth may be complimentary sometimes, Miss Chaloner."

"I wish you wouldn't call me Miss Chaloner!"

His eyes sparkled at the implied approach toward a greater intimacy.

"You think it is too formal?" he asked.

"It makes no difference to me, one way or the other," she answered; "but Mr. Gresham don't like it. Every one calls me Ida."

"Every one!" Reginald Delamere bit his lip at the idea of being placed on the same footing with "every one."

"I suppose Mr. Gresham is your cousin?" he asked.

"No, he is not," said Ida. "He is no relation at all. I have no relations."

"Neither have I."

"Haven't you?" Ida looked up with some interest into his face. "How does that happen?"

"I don't know; they all died, I suppose."

"And I don't think mine ever existed," laughed Ida. "It's rather forlorn, isn't it?"

"Well, no; I don't know that it is," said Reginald, thoughtfully. "I do not mind it."

"Ah! that is because you are rich."

"And you?"

"Oh," said Ida, frankly, "I am as poor as—as Job's cat, if you know exactly how poor that is. I haven't anything. If I want a shoestring or a stick of candy, I have to go and ask Mr. Gresham for two cents. It must be nice to be rich."

She spoke dreamily, looking out toward the horizon, dimly visible through the trunks of the old trees beyond, while into her heart came the dim, vague longings for a future—a definite career of her own, which should one day lead to independence, which comes to every woman worthy of the name."

"But," hazarded Reginald Delamere, "all this is very strange. Would you think it impertinent if I were to ask you to tell me your history?"

"It is no secret," said Ida, bitterly. "Everybody in Deepdale knows how friendless and solitary and alone I am, except for the charity of those on whom I have not even the shadow of a claim."

And then, leaning against a stone wall covered with silver-green lichens and mosses, with the shifting green lights of the sunset falling on her face, Ida Chaloner told him the strange, romantic story of her life.

"I never minded it when I was a child," she said, sadly. "In fact, I never thought much about it until this spring, when Mrs. Gresham talked to me one day when the family were all away and told me that I ought to begin seriously to think about my future. Future! I don't want to think about it. Oh, I wish I could always have stayed a child!"

And the dark eyes, glittering through momentary mist, looked more radiant than ever.

"Come, let us walk on again," she said, catching up the straw hat that had fallen at her feet. "I don't want to talk about it any more."

"I don't wonder at it," said Delamere, recovering the reins of Ali Baba, who had been peacefully cropping grass in the shaded wood and dell. "But, Ida, I am glad you have told me."

"Why?"

"Isn't it a sign that you have reposed some confidence in me?"

"No confidence at all," said Ida, bluntly. "Didn't I tell you that everybody in Deepdale knew it."

"But not from your lips?"

"That makes no difference."

"I think it does. But, Ida, what I was going to say was this: We are both alone in the world—we are both without living relations. I have a guardian, to be sure, but he cares

no more for me than he does for any other mercantile charge or parcel intrusted to his care, so, after all, it amounts to the same thing. We can sympathize with each other, Ida, or shall we not be friends?"

There was something in the tone of his voice that appealed to Ida's heart—she took his offered hand.

"Yes," she said, impulsively, "we *will* be friends."

And Ida put up her cherry lips as Reginald Delamere inclined his tall head toward her and sealed the mutual compact with a genuine, hearty kiss.

Reginald colored deeply, while a thrill seemed to pass through every nerve of his body. To her it was such a kiss as she might have given to Mr. Gresham, or Angie, or even the doll Marguerite.

"Ida," he cried, "did you really mean that?"

"Of course I did. Oh, take care, Reginald—you hurt my hand."

He pressed the slim fingers reverently to his lips.

"I would not hurt you for a king's ransom," he murmured.

"Take care you don't then," she answered, merrily. "Oh, there goes Ali Baba's foot right through the crown of my straw hat—and it was only last Sunday Eleanor was saying it was too shabby to wear many more weeks. What will Mrs. Gresham say?"

"There are plenty of hats in New York," said Reginald. "I'll write on for one to be sent you."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," answered Ida, emphatically. "It's bad enough to be without a hat, but I should be without a head if you were to do that."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Gresham would take it off," laughed Ida, "particularly *Mrs.* There, come along, we have only a little way to walk in the sunshine, and I dare say it won't hurt me."

Reginald was sorry that she had passed out of the confidential mood, in which she was so sweet, into this gay, rallying way; but he had no choice but to adapt himself to the present phase, and walked along, his tropical young head nearly turned by Ida's loveliness and soft vivacity.

"The most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life," he thought to himself, as with a gay wave of the hand she disappeared into the house, leaving him to convey Ali Baba to his quarters beyond the hennery.

Mrs. Gresham was looking very grave when Ida came into the house.

"Ida," she said, "was that Reginald Delamere you came up the hill with?"

"Yes," said Ida, carelessly. "Angie, see here; these are the very red berries you wanted for your necklace. I found them in the woods."

"Did you walk all the way through the woods with Reginald Delamere?" persisted Mrs. Gresham.

"No, ma'am; only from the big oak that was struck by lightning last year."

"What were you talking about?"

"Oh, lots of things! I can't remember all we talked about. He led Ali Baba, and we walked and chatted. We compared notes about our lives, and agreed to be great friends."

"It strikes me you are getting intimate on a very short acquaintance, Ida."

"Oh! but you haven't heard it all," said Ida, demurely. "We shook hands."

"Oh, Ida! Ida! will you never learn propriety?" sighed Mrs. Gresham, really distressed. "A young lady's hand should be as precious as her lips."

"That isn't the worst of it, ma'am," said Ida, mischievously. "He kissed me!"

"Ida Chaloner! that young man kissed you?"

"No, I'm wrong. He didn't kiss me."

"I am very much relieved to hear it," said Mrs. Gresham, with a long breath.

"It was the other way entirely," went on Ida, roguishly, watching Mrs. Gresham's shocked face from beneath her long lashes. "*I* kissed *him*."

"Ida!"

"Well, where's the harm?" said the girl, defiantly. "I kiss Monty half a dozen times a day, and Papa Gresham, too."

"That is a totally different thing," cried Mrs. Gresham. "Oh! Ida, Ida, what *shall* I do with you?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," said Ida. "I shall have to be sent out as a governess, I suppose."

"As a governess!" groaned the clergyman's good wife. "You are just about as fit to be a governess as that white kitten there, with the blue ribbon round its neck. When will you learn that you are no longer a child?"

"Mamma," whispered Angie, who was sorely puzzled by this unusual scene, "what has Ida done?"

"Nothing, child—nothing that I can tell you. Go off to your play."

"*I* can, then," said Ida, pouting out her cherry-red lips. "I kissed Reginald Delamere! There! I'm not ashamed of it."

Mrs. Gresham, with a look of reproach, took Angeline's hand and led her out of the room, while Ida, scarce conscious whether she was the more angry or amused, caught up the kitten and ran out into the garden.

"I don't know what they all mean," said Ida, with reddened cheeks and eyes that had the startled look of a wild deer.

CHAPTER X.

MR. GRESHAM REMONSTRATES.

"MAMMA," pleaded Angie, "may I go with Ida? Do tell me what it all means."

But Mrs. Gresham, without volunteering any explanation, sent the child out to feed a brood of small, downy-winged morsels, by courtesy called chickens, which haunted the shed where Ali Baba was domesticated, and herself went straight to her husband's study.

"Milo," she said, "I want to speak to you."

"In a few minutes, Selina. I have just got to the foot of this troublesome question, which—"

"*Now*, Milo, and at once."

The Reverend Mr. Gresham laid down his books, with a vague wonder whether or not the house was on fire; or, if not, what was the meaning of Selina's unwonted haste.

"What is it, my dear?" he said, gradually rousing himself from the wells of learning wherein his soul was plunged.

"Why, it is just exactly what I have all along foreseen!" and Mrs. Gresham recounted to her husband the whole story of Ida's faults and failings. "It's perfectly ridiculous of young Delamere," she wound up by saying, "and worse than ridiculous of Ida."

"My dear," said the Reverend Milo, biting meditatively at the end of a pen, "it's very sad, and very awkward, to be sure; but I don't see that Ida is any more to blame than Reginald."

"That is always the way," said Mrs. Gresham, despairingly; "you never would see any fault in Ida. Don't you understand how necessary it is for a woman to preserve her dignity?"

"A woman! Nay, dear, our Ida is nothing but a child."

"She is woman enough to make trouble among our pupils, you will find."

"And as for dignity," went on Mr. Gresham, "I doubt if the child knows what the word means."

"Then it is high time she learned," said Mrs. Gresham, with asperity.

"Yes, you are right there, my dear," said the Reverend Milo, with a troubled countenance. "I must speak to her, and then, if there is likely to be any continuance of this trouble, I see nothing for it but to send Reginald to Doctor Dayton's."

Dr. Dayton was a wise and learned dominie, who lived about two miles beyond, and was at the head of a "Collegiate Institute for Young Gentlemen," which quite looked down on the Reverend Milo Gresham's modest little establishment.

"It would be a pity, too," said Mrs. Gresham. "Mr. Raynsford is very liberal, and I really felt disposed to like Reginald very much; he is so obliging and gentlemanly, and the children are so fond of him. Besides, you say his capacity is excellent."

"Far beyond the average," said Mr. Gresham, sighing; "his education, apparently, is quite complete, saving and excepting the trifling polish he requires in the matter of the ancient languages, and it is a pleasure to direct the mental efforts of one who shows such quick appreciation and scholarly intellect. However," and Mr. Gresham rose from his seat reluctantly, "I suppose it is better to exercise a little gentle authority in this instance. Where is Reginald?"

"Are you going to speak to him first?"

"Certainly, and then, if necessary, to Ida."

"He was in the garden when I came across the entry. He has a fancy for reading his French books out under the old pear-tree."

"Very well, I will go to him there," said Mr. Gresham; "it will savor less of obnoxious formality than to summon him to my presence."

Meanwhile, Ida, hurrying from the recollection of her lecture, without any settled goal or object, passed down the lilac-shaded walks that led through the garden of Deepdale Rectory, to a shady spot, in which a hoary old pear-tree threw its umbrella-like canopy over a corner where lilies of the valley swung their bells, like fairy chimes of silver, and pale-blue forget-me-nots grew. A rustic seat of twisted cedar boughs, ingeniously constructed by Geoffrey Moreland and his cousin Montmorenci years ago, was placed against the trunk of this tree, and here, reclining in the cool shadows, his dark hair pushed back from his brow, and his eye fixed not on the copy

of "Corneille" that was in his hand, but on the blue vacancy of the sky beyond, Reginald Delamere was living over again, in fancy, the delicious hour through which he had just passed. He could not study, for the dimpled face of Ida Chaloner came like a dream of beauty between his eye and the page. He could not think, for her sweet voice sounded like an echoed refrain through the leafy murmurs of the drooping boughs that surrounded him.

A first love is like the measles, people experience it in very different degrees. Some have it lightly, others suffer from its most aggravated type. Reginald was taking it very severely indeed.

What was his surprise, in glancing up at what seemed to him the casual stir of the lilac foliage that walled in this sylvan retreat, to see Ida Chaloner in the attitude of a surprised forest nymph, holding back the branches with one hand, and looking as if she were inclined to shrink back and disappear from vision. At first he thought it but an optical delusion, the natural consequence of an absorbed meditation; then he knew that it was an actual reality.

He sprung instantly to his feet.

"Ida!"

She laughed, yet blushed in the same moment.

"I did not know you were here, Reginald; but I shall not go back for all that."

"Go back! I should think not. Sit down here in the cool shade: you look flushed."

"And well I may." She did not accept the proffered seat, but leaned against the heavy trunk of the pear-tree, twisting a red clover-stalk round and round on her slender fingers. "Oh, Reginald, such a lecture as I have had!"

"What do you mean, Ida?"

"Mrs. Gresham has scolded me within an inch of my life," cried Ida, with a little petulant curve of her lips. "I am all that is wicked and monstrous—and she don't fairly know whether she is to send me to a lunatic asylum or get some situation for me as plain cook and laundress."

"Scolded you, Ida! and for what?"

"It's you that ought to be scolded, I think," said the girl, laughing hysterically; "for my sole offense consisted in walking home with you and Ali Baba—that, and some other things," she added, consciously.

"Ida," said the young man, "that is intolerable!"

"Just what I say myself," said Ida, in an aggrieved tone of voice.

"I will not permit it."

"Yes, but you can't help yourself!"

"I can—and I will, if occasion offers," asserted Reginald Delamere.

He did look very manly and capable of fighting his own way, as he stood there, with darkening brow and blue eyes growing almost black in the excitement of the moment.

Ida looked up at him, unconsciously admiring the decision of his tone, and wishing within herself that *she* were a man also.

"*You* may, perhaps," she said, with a sigh; "but what can I do?"

"The best thing for you to do just now, my dear," said a mild and moderate voice close to them, "is to go back to the house. I want a quiet talk with Reginald by our two selves."

And Mr. Gresham, parting a little screen of leaves with his white, plump hands, quietly stepped into the secluded spot.

Ida burst out laughing. Reginald colored a hot, angry crimson.

"Don't send me up to the house, Mr. Gresham," she pleaded; "I shall only be scolded there."

"And don't you deserve it, Ida?" asked the good clergyman, very gravely.

"No; I don't think I do. What for?"

"For your very foolish and ill-considered conduct, Ida."

"What have I done?" flashed out the girl, suddenly drawing her slender figure up to its full height, and looking at Mr. Gresham with flashing eyes. "I have walked with Reginald through the woods! I have—yes, I *have* kissed him once. What of it? Don't Angie do the same thing? Wasn't she out with Reginald half the morning yesterday? Didn't he kiss her before your very eyes when he took her off the horse at the front door?"

"My dear," said the clergyman, "is it possible that you do not perceive the wide difference between yourself and Angie?"

A sort of vague, semi-defined consciousness seemed to come over Ida at his words. Her eyes fell, the rich color deepened on her cheek, and she made a movement as if to retreat, but checked herself instantly.

"We have neither of us done anything of which we need be ashamed, sir," said Reginald, haughtily.

"I am quite assured of that, my boy," said Mr. Gresham; "but the world looks at these things quite differently. Do you know what this same censorious world would say of this?"

"No, sir."

"It would say that I had maneuvered to entrap my wealthy pupil."

"How entrap him, sir?" questioned Ida, still totally unconscious of the meaning of her guardian.

"Go up to the house, Ida; you have heard quite enough," said Mr. Gresham; and he spoke so resolutely that, anxious as she was to hear the conversation out, Ida did not venture to linger.

"You see how ignorant she is of life and its ways, Reginald," said the good man, looking after the light calico dress as it fluttered up the garden-path in the distance.

"She is an angel, sir!" cried Reginald, enthusiastically.

"Granted; but angels know very little of the world," returned Mr. Gresham, rather sarcastically. "Do you think it is right to take advantage of her child-like innocence?"

"I, sir? I take advantage of it?"

"You see, Reginald," pursued Mr. Gresham, "it is exactly as I was saying. The world will assert that I entrapped you —a wealthy, inexperienced boy—into an engagement with a girl who is not only penniless, but obscure—ay, and even nameless, because her maintenance is a burden upon my slender means—"

"Then it would be a lie, sir," interrupted Reginald—"a false lie!"

"You and I know that it would, Reginald; but how could we prove our knowledge? There is no method of stopping the world's foul tongue. We must anticipate these things before the actual danger comes. Will you promise me to avoid Ida's society, except as you meet her in the presence of us all?"

"I can make no such promise, sir."

"Reginald," said Mr. Gresham, with a disturbed countenance, "surely you have not been fool enough to lose your common sense because Ida Chaloner has dark eyes and winning gypsy ways!"

"I have been wise enough, sir," said Reginald, a little bitterly, "to appreciate the charms of the most beautiful creature I ever beheld."

"Why, Reginald, she is a mere child—just past her fifteenth year."

"She *will* be a woman, sir, such as you see but once in a century; and if untiring effort and constant devotion will win her—she shall be mine!"

"Dear me, dear me!" said Mr. Gresham, in sore perturbation, "what is to be the end of all this? You must not stay here a day longer—I must write to Doctor Dayton immediate-

ly, and your home must be with him until we can get a response to the communication which I shall at once write to Mr. Raynsford, your guardian, in London."

"You are going to betray me, then?" said the young man, with a suppressed light of anger in his eyes.

"Not betray you, my boy; that isn't the correct word to use. I am going to rescue you, if possible, from the effects of your own hot-headed rashness. Believe me, I shall be very heartily sorry to lose you; but it is for your own good. I will drive over with you to the Collegiate Institute this very evening if you will get ready."

Reginald Delamere made no objection; he took this decision of his temporary guardian so quietly that the good man half hoped he had unnecessarily alarmed himself.

"After all," he soliloquized within himself as he was driving home from the Collegiate Institute, after having committed the handsome young rebel to the scholastic charge of Dr. Dayton, a plump, elderly gentleman, with a white cravat and a great deal of pompousness of manner—"perhaps it was nothing but the natural contradictory impulses of a spoiled boy which made him speak as he did. Very likely he'll forget her the moment he is out of her influence, and we shall have alarmed ourselves and annoyed him, all without a purpose. As for her—pooh! pooh!—she is heart-whole, the little witch! Two children—that is all; and I might as well blame a pair of kittens for frolicking together. But I do believe Mrs. Gresham was thoroughly alarmed. Ha! ha! ha!"

And the honest clergyman chuckled to himself as he drove through the secluded country roads at the facility with which womankind in general allowed themselves to get alarmed about nothing.

"As for Ida," he pondered, "I don't quite know what we are to do with her, if those big Oriental eyes and drooping lids of hers are going to raise the mischief generally. She is only a child, but she's going to prove a troublesome child I'm afraid. Mrs. Gresham and I must take the matter seriously into consideration. I wish we could afford to send her away somewhere, for a year or two, until she learns common sense!"

Ida and Eleanor were both in the door-way when the buggy drove up.

Ida ran out to meet Mr. Gresham.

"Where have you been?" was her first question.

"I have been over to Doctor Dayton's."

"What for?" she pursued, quite artlessly.

"To take Reginald Delamere there," was the answer.

"Reginald! To Doctor Dayton's! And why was that?"

"Ida," said the clergyman, quite gravely, "if you do not know already, it is better for me not to explain things to you."

And he went into the house, leaving Reginald's man, Varney, who was staying at the rectory overnight, in charge of Ali Baba, previous to his removal to the Collegiate Institute, to take care of the horse and buggy.

Ida turned to Eleanor with a sorely puzzled face.

"Dear Eleanor," she said, wistfully, "what does it all mean? Tell me, please!"

And Eleanor, who had heard from her mother's perturbed lips the whole story, looked pityingly into the sweet, appealing eyes.

"Ida, don't you know? Is it possible that you are so blind as not to see that Reginald Delamere is in danger of liking you too well?"

"Me! Liking me too well! Eleanor," added Ida, after a moment or two of perfect silence, "do you mean—of *loving me?*"

"Yes, you strange little elf," said Eleanor, amused, in spite of herself; "that is just exactly what I do mean."

Another dead silence ensued. Ida patted her soft hand mechanically on Jowler's shaggy head.

"Would that be so very dreadful?" she asked.

"Yes, of course. You are both too young, and Reginald is far too rich."

"How too rich?"

"You know, dear," said Eleanor, gently, "you are quite without means, and—and there is no means of ascertaining your family or parentage."

"Is that a fault?" flashed out the girl.

"Not in my eyes, Ida; but in the world—"

"The world! the world!" interrupted Ida, passionately. "I shall have spirit and resolution enough to defy the world!"

"Ah, Ida, we none of us can do that. But tell me, dear—you don't really care for this Reginald Delamere?"

"Yes—no! I didn't two minutes ago; I don't know whether I do or not now. If I do!" she cried, with shining eyes, and a strange startled turn of the head, "it is your fault! I never thought of it until you put it into my head!"

And she vanished away into the twilight like a spirit of the dew and shadow.

As Eleanor stood, straining her eyes into the uncertain light,

after the flying figure, a soft voice fell on her ear from the open window:

"Eleanor!"

"Mamma," cried the girl, "are you there?"

"Yes; and I have heard what you told Ida. My dear, it was scarcely wise."

"It was the truth, mamma."

"I know it, but it was impolitic, nevertheless. There are some things that feed on opposition; and this boy-and-girl folly belongs to them. Ida's nature is just sufficiently fantastic to mislead her in such an instance as this. I hope she won't brood over the idea; but I do believe it would have been the wiser part to have laughed it off."

But half an hour later, when Mrs. Gresham and Eleanor saw Ida sitting in the kitchen nursing on her lap a family—consisting of Marguerite, the big doll, the kitten, and a lame puppy, which had commended itself specially to her soft little heart, and gravely haranguing them, *à la* Mother Goose, infinitely to the amusement of Angie, who listened, with her own doll in imminent danger of a determination of blood to the head, in consequence of the intense interest of its owner—they agreed that Ida could not be in very great peril of a broken heart, after all.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECRET MARRIAGE.

NEARLY three weeks had passed since the night in which the Reverend Milo Gresham had driven home from the Collegiate Institute, and Ida had questioned Eleanor as to the meaning of this, to her, unaccountable mystery of going and coming. Mr. Gresham was daily expecting an answer to the hurried missive he had sent off to Parker Raynsford at the Brahmin Hotel, Nottington Street, London; and Ida, apparently reconciled to the new order of things, was happy as any little queen in the monotonous round of her daily duties—to all appearance, that is to say—but there were times when a deeper shade of thoughtfulness came into her eyes, and a pensiveness quite foreign to her usual manner would settle upon her momentarily, and then be gone.

She was sitting at her embroidery in the window, on a sultry July afternoon, with Angie talking to her, and the lame puppy stretched out on the window-ledge in the sunshine, when Mrs. Gresham came hurriedly into the room.

"I wish I had some more of that Marseilles trimming,"

she said, in a hurried sort of way. "The dress-maker is to be here to-morrow, and the trimming just falls short half a breadth. That is the way it always happens, I do believe. Eleanor might have gone to the village to match it, but she has one of her nervous headaches; and if I send one of the boys they will be sure to bring me silk galloon, or alpaca braid, or something else that I don't want and can't use. I've tried that before."

"Let me go for it, Mrs. Gresham," cried Ida, springing up. "I have nothing particular to do, and I want a walk."

"But it is so warm, Ida."

"I don't care for that. Where's the sample? Oh, dear! I am so tired of sitting still!"

And she yawned, with her arms stretched over her head.

"Well, I am sure I shall be very glad to have the trimming—there is only half a yard of it wanted; stay, perhaps you had better get three quarters of a yard, to make sure—at eighteen cents. I could send by papa, to-morrow, I suppose, but Miss Marshall is to be here early in the morning, and I don't want to lose any time."

"Mamma, can't I go too?" pleaded Angie.

"After all your complaints of a pain in the side, this morning? No, certainly not, my child."

Angie looked disappointed.

"I'll not be gone long, Angie," said Ida. "It isn't such a very long walk."

"It is two miles and a half, Ida," said Mrs. Gresham, reproachfully, "and I don't wish you to walk fast and get your blood heated, on any account. Angie will do very well without you, and if you are home by the tea hour, it will be in ample time."

So Ida set forth with the sample of Marseilles trimming, and the eighteen cents in Mrs. Gresham's faded little leather porte-monnaie, safe in the depths of her dress pocket.

"I've a great mind to take Marguerite with me," she said, as she opened her not very new sun-umbrella on the threshold, "but then, I suppose, the village girls would laugh. Oh, dear, I wish I wasn't growing so tall. Take good care of Marguerite, Angie, while I am gone."

"Yes," said Angie, sincerely, "I will."

"Ida will have to give up her dolls in another year," said Mrs. Gresham, laughing, yet annoyed. "She is growing too old for that nonsense."

It was a long walk; but then Ida liked exercise, and enjoyed every step of the way. She bought the trimming; invested

four pennies of her own in gayly striped sugar "Jackson balls," to divide with Angie, and two more in a quarter of a yard of cherry-colored ribbon to loop a white muslin dress, on which she and Angie were engaged, for the behoof of the latter's doll.

As she turned away from the counter, her eye fell on a daily New York paper, crumpled and much worn, and the remembrance of a plan she had often pondered on during the last few days entered her mind. But, alas! she had no money left, and it was not likely that the clerk would refund the cash expended for the "Jackson balls" and the cherry-colored ribbon. Neither was it likely that she would soon again have the opportunity to buy a paper without the notice and comment of the Gresham family. She was turning away with a sigh, when the clerk, who was tying up a parcel for a fat old woman just beyond, reached over to tear off a bit of the coveted sheet, for wrapping-paper.

"Oh, stop!" cried Ida, breathlessly. "Have you finished reading that paper?"

"Yes," the clerk said, "we have; it is day before yesterday's paper."

"I should like so much to read it," faltered Ida. "Can I have it?"

"Certainly," returned the clerk, remembering that Mr. Gresham's family took no daily paper. "I've plenty of wrapping here, only this was so handy. You're welcome to it, Miss Chaloner."

"Thank you very much," said Ida, sincerely, and she went out of the store, holding the precious parcel in her hand, with her cheeks as bright as the ribbon she had just been buying.

"Now," thought Ida Chaloner to herself, "I can read all the advertisements, and may be find some way of earning my own living. For although they're so kind to me, it can't continue always. We must contrive some way of obtaining our own livelihood, we girls that haven't any fathers or mothers or money. Eleanor is to be an assistant teacher in some school; but then Eleanor is so gentle and lady-like, and has studied so hard, and remembers everything that she studies. I can't be a teacher or a governess, but I might be something else, I suppose."

She was deeply absorbed in these meditations, as she crossed a tranquil bit of wood, just beyond the knot of houses called Deepdale Village, when a voice roused her from her thoughts, and a shadow fell across the green grass at her feet.

"Ida!"

"Oh, Reginald!" she cried, breathlessly, her face lighting up in an instant, "is it possible that this is you? Oh, I am so glad to see you!"

He held out his arms silently; she ran into them like a delighted child, and kissed him again and again.

"You are glad to see me, *carissima mia?*"

"Oh, so glad, Reginald! It seems a year since we met!"

"Then you do love me a little?"

"Love you? Yes, with my whole heart, Reginald."

He looked down at her as if to speak, but checking the sentence that rose to his lips, substituted another in its stead.

"Where are you going, Ida?"

She told him the story of the Marseilles trimming, adding, gleefully:

"Wasn't it fortunate that I thought of coming home this way instead of by the Deepdale turnpike?"

"Very."

"And where did you come from, Reginald?"

"I drove down to the post-office, Ida, after letters. The horse and carriage are just beyond—would you like a ride?"

"Oh, of all things!" cried Ida, dancing up and down on the tips of her slender feet with a child's exuberant delight. "But—oh, Reginald, perhaps Mr. Gresham wouldn't like you to drive me home after—after—"

"Then we won't go home: we'll take a turn in an entirely different direction," said Reginald, quietly drawing her hand through his arm.

Ida had her own private doubts on the subject of the perfect "propriety," according to Mrs. Gresham's theories, of this drive, but the air was so delicious, and the low carriage looked so inviting, and the horse tossed his head so spiritedly, to say nothing of her delight at having thus unexpectedly encountered Reginald Delamere, that she banished all hesitation and took her place beside him as happy as a bird.

"Let me drive, Reginald," she coaxed.

"No, Ida, the horse is too spirited, and your life is far, far too precious to be risked, even in the slightest degree."

"I am sure I could drive him."

"I am sure I shall not let you attempt it."

Through the quiet country roads they rolled smoothly along, Ida enjoying every inch of the way, Reginald watching her with amused, tender eyes, as she leaned out to catch the swaying willow boughs that canopied the road, and uttered little exclamations of delight at the rural beauties of the landscape.

"Are you very happy, darling?" he asked, in a low tone.

She turned suddenly toward him, attracted by the tone of his voice.

"Reginald, what makes you look so grave?"

"I have been thinking, Ida."

"Of what?"

"Of many things—and firstly and foremostly, of yourself."

"Myself?" she echoed.

"I will tell you all about it, Ida. I have been wondering whether you love me."

"To be sure I love you, Reginald."

"Do you love me well enough to become my wife?" he asked, gravely and suddenly.

"Your wife?" she repeated, slowly. "Yes, I think I might, after awhile."

"No, but now, Ida."

"Now, Reginald?" she repeated, in a voice that was fluttered and faint.

"Yes, *now*."

"No, Reginald, I don't feel quite sure of myself; I am not sure. It means so much, Reginald—your *wife!* No! I am certain, no."

"Ida darling, can not you trust me?"

"I do trust you, Reginald. I do love you," she cried, vehemently.

"Then why are you unwilling to become my wife?"

"I don't know, Reginald. I think it is because it is so sudden," she faltered.

"Listen to me, Ida," he said, letting the reins fall to his knee, and taking both her hands in his; "I received, this afternoon by the mail, a note from my guardian, Mr. Raynsford, inclosing a letter to Mr. Gresham, which I am to deliver myself. The note written to me is brief and civil—he hopes to see me soon, and all that sort of thing, which means, translated out of the Raynsford vernacular, that he is coming here to pack me off to Europe as soon as possible."

"Oh, Reginald! and will you go?"

"What else can I do?"

"And shall you deliver the letter inclosed?"

"Certainly. Mr. Raynsford knew that he could trust in my honor as a gentleman. Now, Ida, we have but a brief time before us in which to act freely and unfettered. When Mr. Raynsford comes, as undoubtedly he will do very soon, we shall be parted—probably forever, but, at all events, for years. Ida, it is in your power to prevent this."

"What can I do, Reginald?" she asked, with her large, dilated eyes fixed upon his face.

"You can become my wife, Ida."

"When?"

"Now—this very day. We can easily drive down to Lennoxville, and be married by the clergyman there, returning before you are ever missed."

"Married!" repeated Ida, in a tremulous voice. And even then she did not realize the deep meaning, the solemn import of the word she uttered. It seemed to her like a chapter out of one of her childhood's fictions—like being an actor in one of the tableaus they sometimes had in Deepdale Village. Strange and startling though it was, there was a novelty in the idea that Ida, thorough child as she was, rather liked. What would Angie say? And Mrs. Gresham, who lectured her as if she were nine years old, and dealt out her slender stock of pocket-money to her in pennies, lest she should be tempted to spend it foolishly.

"Married," repeated Reginald Delamere, firmly. "Once my own wife, Ida, no earthly power can part us, save for a little while. We have a right to choose for ourselves and decide our own destiny; and if you really love me—"

"I do love you, Reginald—at least I think I do. But it all seems like a dream."

"It will seem natural enough soon, darling."

Ida leaned over the side of the carriage, trying to realize this strange, new aspect of affairs; but the more she tried to think connectedly, the less able was she to fix her mind resolutely on the question which was so seriously to affect her future life. She noted the buttercup blossoms in the hedge—she turned her head to watch the arrowy flight of a brown-winged bird from the dense boughs of a cedar-tree, and caught herself wondering, even at that eventful moment, whether his nest was in that tree, and how many eggs there were in it. Her mind seemed swarming with irrelevant thoughts and reflections, and the more she tried to govern her idle fancy, the more rebellious it grew—and she gave up the attempt in despair.

Reginald had been silently waiting for her to speak, and when she sat back in the carriage once more, he himself broke the silence.

"You will marry me, Ida?"

"Yes, Reginald; I will marry you," she answered, taking heart. For, after all, what difference did it make? She must marry somebody at some time, she supposed—all women did

—and Reginald was rich and handsome, and she liked him; besides, with that strange, absorbed look on his face, she dared not say "No" to him. He might do some desperate deed—he might shoot himself, or go off to California—in fact, Ida thought him capable of doing any rash action. And why should she disappoint him, after all? Yes, she *would* marry him!

The rest of the drive was like an idyl from the enchanted pages of romance to the infatuated lover and the young girl who sat beside him. They knew that the sun shone like a vapor of radiant, tremulous gold—that the shadows of tree and bush lay across their pathway—that the air was full of soft scents and the piercing songs of summer birds; but of aught else they could have remembered or described nothing. And every now and then Reginald drew her tenderly to his breast, and whispered:

"Ida darling, are you sure that you love me?" and Ida answered:

"Yes, Reginald, quite sure."

The little village church of Lennoxville was open when they drove up under the shade of the overhanging elms. It was Friday afternoon, and the evening service was just over. The near-sighted rector was standing on the chancel steps talking to a bent old farmer and his wife, but there was no other person in the church as Reginald led Ida up the aisle. She looked wonderingly at the painted glow of the chancel window, where blue and amber and deep crimson glittered with kaleidoscopic brightness, and thought what a sweet, picturesque little temple of worship it was, but no vague forebodings of the future or grave realization of the importance of the step she was about to take was borne in upon her mind.

Reginald Delamere spoke a few words to the near-sighted clergyman in a whisper.

"Oh, certainly, certainly," he answered, in a puzzled sort of way. "I had forgotten the appointment, but—but I find myself getting a little forgetful of late, and I dare say it is all right. Mr. Ferguson"—to the farmer—"perhaps you and your wife would remain as witnesses. We will not detain you more than ten minutes."

"Yes, sir, certain," said the farmer, seating himself in the front pew and beckoning to his sunburned wife to follow his example. "A weddin' is always agreeable to my ideas, eh, Jerushy?"

"Do be still, Hiram," reproved his wife; and then in a

whisper, "I never did see such a pretty poppet of a bride in all my life, but she looks like a child."

And then, falling on the silence of the sanctuary, came the solemn words of the Episcopal marriage service, and Farmer Ferguson, obedient to a nod from the rector, was promptly on hand to give the bride away. When the time arrived for the ring to be produced there was a momentary pause. Reginald had failed to provide himself with the necessary auxiliary, but he was at no loss. Drawing from his little finger a heavy band of gold that had once been his dead mother's wedding-ring, he placed it on Ida's finger, and the service went on, binding the two young people indissolubly together. It seemed like a dream to Ida—the solemn tones of the white-robed clergyman, the many-colored gleams of the chancel window, raining blue and gold and crimson on Reginald's bowed head, the quiet and coolness of the stone church; nor did she feel herself wakening from it until they were once more in the sunshine of the church grounds, with Reginald lifting her into the carriage, and the swift landscape once more flitting past them.

"My wife," he murmured, "my love, my little treasure!"

And then Ida Chaloner began to feel conscious that she was Ida Chaloner no longer—but Reginald Delamere's wife.

CHAPTER XII.

ANGIE BETRAYS THE SECRET.

THE hour for the evening meal at Deepdale Rectory had come and gone, and Mrs. Gresham was beginning to feel a little uneasy at Ida's protracted absence, when her elastic footstep sounded on the path without, and she came lightly in.

"Here is your trimming, Mrs. Gresham," she said, tossing the little parcel into Mrs. Gresham's lap.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Gresham. "I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you; but what kept you so long?"

"You told me yourself not to walk fast."

"That is true, Ida; but—"

"I am so hungry," interrupted the young girl. "Are you through tea?"

"Half an hour ago. Don't you see it's past six? But there is a bowl of raspberries and milk for you, and a slice of Eleanor's cake on the third pantry shelf, in the left-hand corner."

Ida came back presently and perching herself on the doorstep, eat her supper, sharing it liberally with the lame puppy.

"Angie," she said, as the child came in from the garden, "here are two 'Jackson balls' for you."

As she drew them from her pocket, she felt the crumpled folds of the daily paper. Ah, she should not need it now.

"Ida," said Angie, "won't you come out and help me to water those verbenas we transplanted last night?"

"I don't feel like it to-night, Angie," said Ida, resting her cheek on her hand, and gazing out thoughtfully where the purple twilight was beginning to deepen over the distant woods.

"But, Ida—"

"Don't tease her, my dear," said Mrs. Gresham; "I dare say she is tired after her long walk."

"No," said Ida, "I am not tired, but I don't know what I am."

"Ida, you are not crying?" faltered Angie, perfectly aghast.

"Crying! of course I am not crying. What a ridiculous idea!"

But although Ida laughed merrily there was a moisture on her eyelashes that belied the silver tones.

"Let me alone, Angie; that's all I want," she said, almost petulantly, and Angie obeyed, ready to cry herself at Ida's unusual caprices of temper.

"I'm afraid you have overtired yourself, Ida," said Mrs. Gresham, gently.

"No, ma'am, I haven't," said Ida; "I'm only cross."

Angie Gresham had stolen upstairs to her own room, and, by the light of the bedroom taper, was sitting alone on the floor, with her doll's wardrobe scattered around in miscellaneous confusion, engaged in sorting out the various articles which might be improved by a "weekly wash"—a ceremonial which Angie regularly went through, greatly to the detriment of her fresh calico apron, when the door opened and Ida came in.

"Is that you, Ida?" cried Angie. "Don't you want to lay out Marguerite's things? Jane Ann is so careless of her clothes this warm weather, you can't think."

But Ida, without answering, went to the little hair trunk, where, among her own most treasured possession, "Marguerite" and her wardrobe lay. She took out the precious doll, together with several smaller satellites in wood and china, and deliberately made a bundle of their clothes and belongings.

"There, Angie," she said, tossing them into the child's lap, "you may have them now. I give them all to you."

"Ida!"

"I shall not want them any more," said Ida, with a quivering lip; "I am married."

"You, Ida! married!"

"Hush!" said Ida, sitting down on the floor and hugging Angie close to her breast, while the big tears, like drops of crystal, coursed down her cheeks. "I confide it to you, Angie, as a great secret; you must not tell a living soul."

"No," said Angie, in an awe-stricken voice, "I won't; but, Ida, are you really married?"

"Yes," said Ida, holding out the finger on which the heavy band of gold glistened in the lamp-light; "and this is my wedding-ring. I was married to Reginald Delamere this afternoon."

"Oh, Ida! But I thought people only married people they loved very dearly."

"Well, don't I love Reginald very dearly?" asked Ida, a little shortly.

"But you've only been acquainted with him three or four weeks. Nobody can love a man enough to marry him in three or four weeks."

"Angie," said Ida, with grave dignity, "you are only a little girl, and little girls don't know anything about such things."

"But tell me about it, Ida."

"Well," said Ida, twirling the new ring round and round her finger, "I met Reginald in the woods just beyond Deepdale, and he told me how much he loved me, and—and we went to the dear little stone church in a place called Lennoxville—"

"I know where Lennoxville is," interrupted Angie. "Papa took me there once, oh, ever so long ago! when I was a little girl, and there was a big white house on the green, and a flagpole, and—"

"Yes, that is the place," nodded Ida. "Well, we went there, and we were married, and that's all there is to it."

Angie sat looking at Ida, with a countenance of mute, childish awe.

"Ida," she said at length, in a tone that was so low that it was almost a whisper, "how does it seem to be married?"

Ida broke out into a peal of laughter.

"Why, you little silly—how should it seem?"

"I mean, how do you feel?"

"Just as I always did, of course. I am the same Ida, am I not?"

"Yes, but—mamma is married, and so is Doctor Gibson's

wife, who takes snuff, and is always talking about 'my man.' You don't seem like either of them, Ida."

"I dare say not. But I *am* married for all that!"

"And are you glad?"

"Yes, I suppose I am."

"Are you going away from here, Ida?" persisted Angie, whose mind was all on the *qui vive* with curiosity.

"Not just at present, until Reginald—"

"Why don't you say 'my husband,' Ida?"

"My husband, then," said Ida, laughing and coloring—"until my husband has seen his guardian. And it must be a great secret, Angie, until then. I don't know why I happened to tell you of it, except that we have been so happy together, you and I, and Marguerite and Jane Ann!"

And Ida bent, half smiling, half sighing, over the senseless dolls that lay staring on the floor.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, as Angie began slowly to pile the dolls' clothes into the pine box that served as trunk, wardrobe, and bureau-drawer.

"I am going to put away the things, Ida," said the child, in a low voice. "I can't fix my mind on anything but what you have told me."

"Nonsense—here, I'll help you sort out the things!"

"Oh, Ida, how can you? I am sure I could not tell a white frock from a flannel sacque, and you, who have just been married—"

For, in this sense of the thing, it was plain that little Angie realized the solemnity of the step Ida had just taken more than the bride herself.

"Oh, what difference does that make?" retorted Ida, somewhat petulantly. "Aren't you going to take Marguerite?"

"Oh, yes; but I shall keep her by herself. Perhaps some day you may come back and want to play with her!"

"Married women don't play with dolls," said Ida, with dignity. "Come, Angie, it is striking ten; it is high time you were in bed! Your mother will be upstairs presently."

Angie obeyed, and buttoning up her little dimity-fringed night-gown, crept into bed; but long after Ida had gone down-stairs she lay tossing on the pillow, restless, distressed, and unable to sleep.

"Why, Angie," said her mother, when she came up to take away the bedroom light, "your eyes are as round as full moons! Why are you not asleep, child?"

"Mamma, I don't feel like it."

"Are you sick, Angie?" questioned Mrs. Gresham, anxiously. "Do you feel ill?"

"Oh, no, mamma—only wakeful!"

Mrs. Gresham busied herself about the room for a moment or two, folding up and putting away scattered articles of raiment, and was just turning to leave the apartment, when Angie, who had once more fallen into absorbed meditation, broke silence, saying, thoughtfully:

"Mamma, isn't it a very serious thing to be married?"

"Certainly it is, Angie—one of the most serious things in life; but what has put such ideas into your little head?"

"Nothing, mamma," the child answered, guiltily; "I was only thinking."

"Then I would choose my thoughts more according to my age and understanding," said Mrs. Gresham, laughing.

"People can't be unmarried again, I suppose, mamma?"

"No, Angie."

"Then what if they found out afterward that they didn't suit each other?"

"They must take the consequences of their own folly, Angie. Now, good-night."

"But, mamma," persisted Angie, who was as morbidly attracted by the forbidden subject as ever was moth by the flame of the fatal torch, "if Ida and her husband—"

"Child," ejaculated Mrs. Gresham, setting down the candle again, "what on earth do you mean? Ida has no husband!"

Angie, who had not dreamed that her unruly tongue could lead her into any such imprudent disclosures, sat up in bed, sorely bewildered. Here she was between two fires. Her parents had always instilled into her mind how wicked it was to be guilty of a lie; yet how could she keep her faithful promise to Ida without telling her mother a deliberate falsehood? And so, as the best way that appeared to her out of this dilemma, Angie fell down again among the pillows, and began to cry.

"I promised Ida not to tell! I promised Ida never to tell!" was her piteous plaint.

"Promised not to tell what? Angeline, I insist upon an explanation of this mystery," enunciated Mrs. Gresham, with as much sternness as her gentle voice was capable of.

At the same moment Ida entered the room, singing some gay snatch out of a Spanish ballad. She stopped short as she saw Angie's tears and Mrs. Gresham's agitation.

"Ida," sobbed the child, "mamma has found it out; but,

indeed, indeed, I did not mean to tell her; it slipped from my tongue somehow."

"What is it, Angie?" firmly questioned her mother, and Angie lifted her eyes to her mother's face, reiterating:

"Please don't ask me, mamma! I promised Ida not to tell."

"Yes, tell her, Angie," said Ida, in a sort of amused desperation. "I don't suppose you meant to betray the secret, but you see it is all out now."

And Angie, hiding her face on her mother's bosom, sobbed out:

"Ida was married this afternoon to Reginald Delamere!"

"Ida," said Mrs. Gresham, turning to her young charge, with a face pale as the white walls beyond, "is this so?"

"Yes."

"You, a child, are married to that boy?"

"Yes."

"When? and where?"

"This afternoon, at Lennoxville."

"And she has given me Marguerite, and all the little dolls," cried Angie, breaking exultingly in. "She says she sha'n't want 'em any more."

"Ida," said Mrs. Gresham, taking the young girl's hand in hers, "come down-stairs with me to my husband's study. You yourself must break to him the dreadful tidings."

"I don't see anything so very dreadful about it," said Ida, impatiently. "I liked Reginald, and I have married him."

"Oh, child, child," cried poor Mrs. Gresham, bursting into tears, "how little you realize the step you have taken."

Mr. Gresham's dismay at hearing of Ida's stolen marriage was even greater than that of his wife. His precautions had been in vain. Reginald's impulsiveness had outgeneraled his wisdom, and although he did not reproach Ida as did his wife, he looked at her with mild eyes of despair, and commiseration.

"My poor child," he said—"my poor, poor child!"

Ida was yet defending the conduct, which, seen from the standpoint of common sense, was beginning to appear a little precipitate in her own eyes, when Jamie brought in a letter.

"Rex Delamere's man, Varney, brought it. Oh, papa, what is the matter?"

For Jamie's eyes were not slow to detect the distressed looks upon the faces of his father and mother.

"Nothing, my son—nothing that you can hear or understand. Go to your studies."

Jamie obeyed, mentally concluding "that Ida had been

getting into some new lark;" and Mr. Gresham opened Parker Raynsford's letter.

"Do not go, Ida," he said, gravely, as she turned to follow Jamie; "the letter may contain matter to concern you vitally."

Ida sat down, tapping her foot restlessly on the threadbare study carpet, while Mr. Gresham broke the seal and cast his eyes over the few formal lines which it contained.

Mr. Raynsford presented his compliments to the Reverend Mr. Gresham, and thanked him for the sense and discretion he had shown in at once putting a stop to the boyish folly which might, if not checked in time, amount to something more serious still. He would, according to Mr. Gresham's valuable suggestions, come at once to the United States, and himself resume the charge of his impetuous, though not ill-disposed ward. And then with a few courteous words, of course, Mr. Raynsford subscribed himself Mr. Gresham's "obedient servant," etc., etc., etc.

"And now," said the Reverend Milo Gresham, looking despairingly at his wife, "what are we to do?"

"I am sure I do not know," was the equally hopeless response.

"Do!" cried Ida, arching her jet-black eyebrows. "I don't see that you are called upon to do anything in particular. Reginald and I have chosen for ourselves, and Mr. Raynsford can't eat us up, nor grind us into powder, like the bad-tempered giant in Angie's story-book."

"Ida," groaned Mrs. Gresham, "will you never cease to be a child?"

The warm-hearted girl threw her arms tenderly round Mrs. Gresham's neck, crying and laughing in the same breath.

"Oh, don't scold me, Mamma Gresham," she cried, in broken sentences. "I know I am a naughty, self-willed little bundle of obstinacy; but, indeed, I love you, and I shall never forget all your kindness to me."

"Then why were you so anxious to go off and leave us?" asked Mrs. Gresham, reproachfully.

"I—I don't think I was anxious to leave Deepdale Rectory," said Ida, as if arguing with herself. "I—I—in fact, Mrs. Gresham, I don't know what did possess me to act so, unless it was that I thought it a grand frolic, and I liked Reginald—"

"Loved him, my dear, I hope," interposed Mrs. Gresham, with an anxious countenance.

"Isn't it the same thing?"

"No, my dear, not by any means?"

"Well, liked—loved—what you please. And now I'm married, and it can't be helped, so please, *please* don't scold me any more."

And Ida's cherry-red lips, put coaxingly up to Mrs. Gresham's quivering mouth, and her arms wound in a most strangling fashion round the good clergyman's old-style white cravat, most effectually barred all further remonstrance.

"One can't scold the child," said Mrs. Gresham, when she had gone back to coax and comfort Angie, who was sobbing in her solitary bed, feeling that she had glaringly abused Ida's confidence and made no end of mischief. "There is something about her that disarms one entirely, no matter how much she may deserve severity. Well, I do hope she may be happy, although she has been rash—very rash."

And Mr. Gresham's heart echoed his wife's mournfully spoken words.

"It is as she herself observed, Selina," he said, wiping his spectacle glasses; "she is married now and it can't be helped. So let us endeavor to make the best of it, Selina, my dear."

CHAPTER XIII.

LA BELLE PARIS.

LIFE is a series of changes and transformations, and romance, founded and modeled after life, is not unlike it in this respect. The scene of our story, which has long lingered among the peaceful shades that surround Deepdale Rectory, shifts now to the most brilliant of modern cities—the Mecca of fashion—the enchanted realm of gayety and refinement—Paris.

The ornamented marble façades of the Hotel Lefevre, in the Place Venmont, were catching the last gilded rays of the December sunshine, which shone cheerily into a magnificently furnished apartment on the second floor, its plate-glass windows crowded with rare exotics in full blossom, and a low fire formed of sticks of perfumed wood, blazing in the arms of twin knights in armor, whose miniature forms did duty in the place of old-fashioned fire-dogs.

The floor was of marble, with a square of velvet, fringed with gold, laid down in the center, where a low lounging-chair was drawn up beside a table of malachite and gold, and on the tinted walls frescoed groups of flowers seemed almost to stir and move in the life-like perfections of their outlines. A gilded basket filled with grapes and roses stood on the table,

and a tiny *tête-à-tête* coffee service of transparently thin china, painted in grotesque faces, peeping through clusters of ivy foliage, had just been pushed aside.

A gentleman—Reginald Delamere—was pacing slowly up and down the rooms, idly watching the level sunshine as it crept up the walls—and in the low chair, her tiny feet resting on an embroidered cushion of satin and gold, sat a fair young girl, in whose face and form we have no difficulty in recognizing the Ida Chaloner of six months ago.

The same, yet not the same. Her dress of rose-colored silk edged with a foam-like fringe of snowy swan's-down, was such as a crowned queen might have worn, and amethysts, outlined with diamonds, swung from her ears, and clasped the folds of silk at her throat. Jewels sparkled on her fingers in rainbow coruscation at every turn of the small, sculptured hands, and the magnificence of her surroundings seemed nothing more than appropriate to her splendid tropical beauty as she reclined there, like a princess of some fabled realms of wealth and loveliness, Ida Chaloner still, but Ida Chaloner exalted and refined by outward concomitants until she seemed another being.

"Rex," she said, letting the book on which her eyes had been dreamily fixed fall to her lap, "I wish you would draw that curtain—the sunshine dazzles my eyes."

"Put up your book, Ida; you have been reading long enough," he said, obeying her request.

"Well, perhaps I have," she said, yawning. "Oh, Rex, how stupid it is here."

For the spoiled child of fortune was already beginning to tire of the rose-wreathed cup of happiness placed to her lips—its flavor was beginning to pall on her palate—its sparkle was growing to be a monotony.

"Stupid!" repeated her husband, in a tone of some slight pique.

"Yes, stupid. If it were not for being presented at court, and taking the wind out of the sails of that pink-skinned Duchess of Bernmouth, who thinks she is the only pretty woman in Paris, I should almost want to leave to-morrow."

"Where should we go?"

"Where? Oh, anywhere for a change."

"Is change, then, so necessary to your happiness?" he asked.

"It has grown to be lately."

"Ida," said Reginald, turning from the window, after a

few minutes of silence, "it is a lovely evening—shall we go for a drive before dinner?"

Ida rose.

"Yes—anything to while away the time till the post comes in. Ring the bell for my maid, please, Rex."

Five minutes afterward, Mrs. Delamere entered the low, open barouche, painted a deep chocolate color, and drawn by a pair of milk-white horses, whose caparisons of gold plate flashed back the level sunshine at every movement of their arched crests. Her dress was of a violet velvet, with a tiny chapeau of the same, whose long plume drooped over her shoulder, and she wore a set of ermine whose snowy whiteness was well relieved against the dark velvet. Violet kid gloves covered her hands, and a tiny carriage-parasol of violet silk, covered with white point d'Alençon lace, swung by an ivory chain from her wrist.

Reginald looked admiringly at her.

"Your taste in dress is perfect, Ida," he said, as he assisted her to her place.

She made him a laughing bow.

"You never expected the little calico-dressed child at Deepdale to come out so brilliantly, did you, Rex?"

"I knew you were all that was beautiful and perfect, dearest," he said, enthusiastically.

"Don't be too devoted, Rex," she said, arching her eyebrows. "One can't live on champagne and sugar cake the whole time."

"Is it a fault to be too fond of my lovely little wife?"

"Well," hesitated Ida, playing with the curved handle of her parasol, "no, not exactly. But really, Reginald, I think it would be rather a relief if you were to give me a good scolding now and then."

"Ida!"

But the capricious beauty had already forgotten her words.

"Tell Jean to drive to the gardens of the Tuileries by the Rue de Rivoli," she cried. "It would be nice to stroll a little way there."

"*Aux Jardins Tuileries*, Jean!" called out Mr. Delamere.

"*Oui, monsieur*," was Jean's response, and Ida, leaning back among the brown velvet cushions, looked dreamily out upon the brilliant phantasmagoria of the Parisian streets, and wondered if she were really the little girl who played with Angie under the apple-trees of the Deepdale Rectory garden, and climbed the mountain after wild berries, carrying Monty Gresham's fishing-tackle for him.

Was she any happier now than she had been in those childish times? Ida hardly knew. She had picked berries to pay for a little agate brooch in those days, treasuring it as if it had been the Koh-i-noor; her caskets were full of pearls and diamonds, Italian cameos and blue-hearted sapphires, now. She had looked on a blue alpaca dress as the realization of the brightest type of costume—there were silks and satins, silver-shining brocades and India muslins in her wardrobe to-day. Yet she looked back on the blue alpaca and the coarsely set agate pin with almost a sigh.

As the stream of private carriages in the Rue de Rivoli passed her, and she became conscious of the envying glances of richly robed ladies, and the open admiration in the eyes of stately gentlemen, she roused herself from her brief reverie.

"Is not this pleasant, Rex? The air is so sweet and bracing?"

"I wish those fellows would not stare so!" ejaculated Delamere, rather shortly. Ida laughed.

"Oh, let them stare. I suppose every new face in Paris creates a sensation."

Late as it was in the day, the gardens of the Tuileries were still crowded with promenaders—ladies who came there to display their faultless toilets and excite the envy of their feminine rivals, and gentlemen who went to see the gay throng of humanity, exchange nods with casual acquaintances, and pick up floating *bonmots* and morsels of fashionable gossip, while exquisitely dressed children played under the care of white-capped *bonnes*, enlivening the whole scene with their merry laughter and ringing voices.

Mrs. Delamere walked along the broad promenade, her violet dress trailing on the pathway behind her, and the ermine half falling from her shoulders, while the delicate crimson glow on her cheek and the brilliance of her large, black-lashed eyes seemed brightened by the chill fresh air and the exercise of her quick, elastic movements. Several acquaintances came up for a word and glance from *la belle Americaine*, and to solicit permission to introduce more, and in fifteen minutes Mrs. Delamere was the belle of the fashion-crowded spot, while her young husband stood by, proud of the sensation she made, yet withal a little uneasy at the enthusiastic admiration so frankly expressed by the demonstrative young Frenchmen.

"Shall we go now, Ida? The sun is nearly down," he whispered, while Mme. la Comtesse d'Ancour held up her plump hands, incased in cream-colored kid gloves, in a polite despair.

"Madame Delamere has not promised to vouchsafe her charming presence at the little ball of the birthday in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. Monsieur would surely not be so heartless as to tear her away, *s'epouse charmante*, until she, Madame la Comtesse, could win a pledge."

Ida promised, laughing at Mme. d'Ancour's earnestness, and they turned once more to the low, chocolate-colored barouche, where the white horses were pawing the ground impatiently and tossing their heads at the gate-way.

As the carriage rolled away, Ida chanced to glance toward the crowd of idlers who are generally congregated round the gates of this enchanted realm of fashion, and as she did so she uttered a little exclamation and grew pale.

"Ida, my darling, what is it?" asked her husband.

She leaned over the side of the carriage and looked eagerly back.

"I must have been mistaken," she cried, "for I don't see it any more—but I—"

"See what?"

"Giuseppe!"

"And pray, who is Giuseppe?"

"Don't you remember all I have told you of Mr. Pierre, the man who used to have a sort of care over me before I came to the Greshams? Giuseppe was his servant. I hated the man always."

"Who, Mr. Pierre, or Giuseppe?"

"Well, I never loved Mr. Pierre, certainly; but I hated Giuseppe most cordially."

"But for what reason?"

"Oh, Rex, how logical you are! I don't know what reason—a child's instinct, I suppose. At all events, I have never forgotten his evil, simpering face, and I am sure I saw it just now, looking down on me from the crowd, just as he has looked at me forty times, in my baby paroxysms of anger. I am sorry he is in Paris."

She shuddered slightly as she spoke, and buttoned the pearl clasps of her ermine as if a sudden chill had come over her.

"My darling, what a strange superstition!" soothed her husband.

"I was always afraid of him, Rex."

"Afraid? Why?"

"I don't know—I can't tell. Don't let us talk about him any more. Let Jean drive to Mademoiselle Micharde's before we go home. I want to order a gold-colored *glace* for the 'ball of the birthday,' as Madame la Comtesse calls it. Shall it be

gold-colored *glace*, Reginald, or a dead-white silk with little puffings over it, and pearls?"

"I like you best in white, dearest."

"But there's more character in the gold color, and I can wear the yellow buttercup wreath with that, the buttercups that have got diamond dew-drops in them."

"Wear what you please, dear; you are lovely to me in whatever you choose to put on."

Ida looked gravely up into Mr. Delamere's face.

"Rex," she said, with all a child's earnestness, "what makes you love me so?"

"What makes the sun shine and the wind blow, you strange little elf?"

"No; but Rex, I don't believe I love you as you love me—not in the same ardent way!" she pursued.

"Perhaps it is because woman's nature is less capable of intense affection than man's. I am stronger and taller than you, therefore my love is developed in proportion."

"No, Rex; that sounds very wise and philosophical, but it is hollow," laughed Ida. "A woman's love is stronger than a man's—that is what my instinct tells me! It's a puzzling question, this love!"

Reginald Delamere looked down upon her with a strange feeling of sadness. Well, it was foolish to expect too much at first. "She did not love him as he loved her." She was only a child—a bud half opened; a young bird who had not yet learned to feel its wings. It would all come to her in time.

There was a pile of letters lying on the little malachite table when Ida came in, and Mlle. Mathilde, the French maid, who had so many more airs and graces than her mistress, made haste to assure her that "the post had brought itself in."

Ida uttered a little scream of rapture, and throwing her parasol and ermine on the floor, twitched off her bonnet, leaving her jetty curls all tumbled and disheveled, and caught up the letters.

"From Mrs. Gresham and Eleanor—oh, Rex, only see! and a postscript that Angie wrote herself, with five blots on it! Darling little Angie, how I wish I could see her again!"

The tears sparkled on Ida's eyelashes as she stood there, eagerly perusing the treasured lines from the simple, yet loving hearts at Deepdale Rectory. Mlle. Mathilde looked up in astonishment, as she gathered up the scattered habiliments from the floor.

"And the little yellow chicken that Angie and I brought

up ourselves, because the hen wouldn't own it, is dead, and Monty has a trout weighing two pounds, and the Robinson Crusoe Cave has all fallen in, because of the autumn freshets, and Geoffrey Moreland is at home again, and Mamma Gresham thinks it will be all right between him and Eleanor yet. Oh, I am so glad!"

Reginald listened to her incoherent words with a smile of loving amusement. What a child she was—full of impulses, and so quick to tears when the tide of her inner affections were stirred!

At this moment a grave servant in black threw open the door beyond.

"Dinner is served, madame."

The table, seen through the folding-doors of the inner apartment, was fragrant with freshly cut roses, and sparkling with glass, and silver, and china. M. Achille understood the art of surrounding the appetite with poetical illusions.

"Come, darling," said Reginald, gently; "leave Deepdale Rectory awhile, and come back to Paris. What are you thinking about so gravely?"

"I was wondering," Ida replied, as she took her seat at the elegantly appointed table, while Achille placed before her a plate of transparent-looking liquid, with small fishes of some savory compound, with cloves for eyes, swimming about among submarine growths of green parsley (for, in Achille's eyes, ordinary soup was transfigured into clear mountain lakes, walled in with rocks of Sèvres)—"I was wondering what I should send dear Eleanor for a wedding-present? Do you suppose Geoffrey will bring her to Paris, Rex?"

"Hardly, I think, my love. Geoffrey is a poor young man, according to what you have told me, and Rome, and Switzerland, and the Alps, winding up with Paris, cost money."

"I forgot," said Ida, thoughtfully; and then looking about her, she added: "Oh, Reginald, it's nice to be rich, isn't it?"

"So people say, *cara mia.*"

"At all events, I will write to Eleanor this evening," she resumed.

"You forget Neverini at the Grand Opera, Ida?"

"We won't go to-night, Rex."

"But I have secured the best box in the house, and we can not get it again this week."

"Oh, then, we'll go," said Ida; "and I can write to-morrow night."

So Mrs. Delamere attended the Grand Opera that night in a white brocade that made her look like a charming little

marchioness of the olden time, and pearls hanging like drops of moonlight in her rose-leaf ears.

Verily her lines had been cast in pleasant places.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DUCHESS OF BERNMOUTH'S DEFEAT.

THE residence of Mme. la Comtesse d'Ancour, in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, was ablaze with lights on the night of the birthday fête, while the broad balustrades were wreathed with tropic vines, and the windows seemed framed in banks of camellias, jasmine, and tea-roses so deliciously sweet that the very air one breathed was a luxury. The musicians, secluded from view in an inner alcove, were discoursing the sweetest of strains, and the salons were already quite full when Mr. and Mrs. Delamere entered.

Ida had carried out the picturesque caprice of appearing in the gold-colored *glace*, with diamond-hearted buttercups in her silken curls, and her ivory shoulders, half veiled beneath a Chantilly lace scarf, whose price would have paid all the family expenses at Deepdale Rectory for a year, while a lace fan, mounted on sticks of carved gold, hung from the amber bracelet at her wrist, and a bouquet of yellow acacias corresponded with her toilet.

There was a universal murmur of admiration as her young husband led this dark-browed beauty in, like some fairy queen, robed in dew and sunshine. *La belle Americaine* had become the topic of conversation in the circles of Paris society, and people crowded eagerly around the flower-festooned door-way to see her enter.

"Ah, *ma belle*, how good of you, how sweet!" cried Mme. la Comtesse, hurrying to meet her, in a pale-blue velvet dress, made very low in the corsage, and blue turquois ornaments that gave her sallow skin a cadaverous effect. "But you are an angel of complaisance. *Ma foi!* I have here of English and of Americans many, so you will not be alone, save in your beauty."

And Ida was at once surrounded, and, as it were, taken possession of, by jeweled ladies and courtly, high-bred gentlemen, with stars and orders glistening on their breasts, while the hours of the evening seemed to slip by as if they were minutes.

Ida enjoyed society thoroughly, and this was a variety of society quite new to her. She was the acknowledged belle of those glittering rooms in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré—titled

gentlemen bowed over her tiny gloved hands, and sued for the honor of this or that unappropriated dance—ladies whose ancestors went back to the ages of feudal story, pronounced her "charming." One gray-haired gentleman, plainly dressed, who paid Ida the prettiest compliment she had that evening received, was a "prince," one of the bulwarks of the French court, and Ida was half pleased, half startled, to learn afterward that a lady, whose name she had not caught in the hasty spoken introduction, but who had patted her head and called her a "veritable little humming-bird," was descended from a well-known line, with the blood of royalty coursing beneath her well-powdered skin!

But the person she liked best of all her new acquaintances was a lady of perhaps thirty-five, whose fringed draperies, in the crowd of the supper-room, caught in Ida's gold bouquet-holder. She turned to apologize in words whose accents were like music, so low, so soft, and so exquisitely modulated.

"Oh, never mind!" cried Ida, and then remembering herself, she laughed, colored, and went on in French, assuring the other that no harm was done.

"You need not speak in French," said the lady, smiling. "I am English-born, if not English-bred, and the sound of the Saxon language is very sweet to me."

"I am so glad," said Ida, impulsively. "I speak French very well, they tell me, yet English is the language most natural to me."

The lady, turning to the gentleman who was with Ida, spoke a word or two in a low voice, and he immediately begged the pleasure of introducing to Mrs. Delamere Mme. Avioli. She was a personage of about five-and-thirty, as we have before said, but looking at least ten years younger, with a complexion of dazzling fairness, hair of bright, luxuriant auburn, and deep-blue eyes.

Her dress was of lilac satin, full of amethystine luster and changing lights, and her jewels were diamonds of great size and brilliancy.

"I fell in love with her the moment I saw her," was Ida's after account of the introduction to her husband. "I think she is the loveliest person I ever saw in my life. I wished for the first time in my existence, after I saw her, that nature had created me a blonde instead of a brunette."

But Ida did not dream how deep the destinies of Mme. Avioli were to be interwoven with her own future, as she stood there, looking with all a child's innocent admiration into the violet, soft eyes, and listening, as if in a sort of spell, to the

words that flowed like liquid silver from the lovely lips of her new friend.

The Duchess of Bernmouth came in rather later than Mrs. Delamere—a wax-skinned, voluptuous blonde, after the style depicted by Peter Paul Rubens' glowing pencil, with blue, sleepy orbs, and a profusion of light flaxen ringlets; a lady whose white satin draperies flowed around her in surging billows, and whose necklace, of pink Neapolitan coral, was said to be the finest article of the kind in all Paris.

Lady Bernmouth, although she was over thirty, had been the reigning queen of fashion for some time, and when people spoke of the dangerous charms of the American stranger, the duchess smiled scornfully and shrugged the beautiful white shoulders, where dimples came and went every time she moved.

"An American," said Lady Bernmouth; "I should as soon think of furling my colors before a Chinese belle, or a young lady from the Court of Japan."

As this was the first field on which the rival beauties had met, there were a great many pairs of eyes upon them, and many significant whispers and secretly exchanged glances, when Mme. d'Ancour, taking it for granted, in her warm superabundance of hospitality, that the English and American ladies would be charmed to know each other, checked the Duchess of Bernmouth in her triumphal progress through the room directly in front of the group of which Mrs. Delamere formed the center.

"Madame la Duchesse," she cried, eagerly, "pray let me do myself the pleasure to introduce you to Mrs. Delamere, the charming American lady who has this evening delighted us with her society."

Lady Bernmouth put up her eyeglass; and then, with the slightest possible inclination of her golden-tressed head, dropped it again.

"Oh, an American!" she said, with a soft, easy insolence of tone and manner; adding, quite audibly enough to be heard: "Nobody knows who these rich *parvenus* of Americans are."

Ida lifted her brilliant, languid eyes, while a deep crimson came to her cheek, and answered, in a voice as soft and low as the duchess's own:

"But we all know who Madame la Duchesse of Bernmouth is, and we have known these ten years."

She turned to the Italian nobleman with whom she was conversing, and the duchess, whose sore point was her thirty-four years and her somewhat *passée* style, colored so red that her

pink Neapolitan necklace seemed to be overflowed and submerged in the scarlet tide of blushes. Nobody laughed, but there was a murmur, almost inaudible, going round the room, and a general attempt to conceal a smile, that made the duchess painfully aware that the story would be all over Paris by the next morning. There had been a passage of arms between Mrs. Delamere and the Duchess of Bernmouth, and Mrs. Delamere had conquered. The fat duchess, with the golden hair and the shoulders like drifts of snow, had met with her Waterloo.

Ida sat up in her white cashmere wrapper that night to write to Angie, and a brief extract from her letter may perhaps give a better representation of her ideas of Parisian life than any other more labored description:

"I have only just returned from a ball in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré," she wrote, after various allusions to Deepdale matters, and many questions on similar topics. "I wish you could have seen me in my yellow dress, and a wreath of my buttercups, which Reginald had had set with diamonds to please me. You would fancy there was a great glittering dewdrop in every cup; the diamonds came from a pair of bracelets that belonged to his mother. I lost one of them, and cried about it; but Rex said it was all nonsense to make my eyes red about so insignificant a thing as a diamond. I think I looked nice—at least Rex said I did; but I believed he would say so if I were to dress in bed-ticking, tied round the waist with red flannel. Oh, Angie, it was so nice! Fancy little me, flirting with counts and marquises, and viscounts, and there was one prince there, the Prince de Molignac, cousin, or grandfather, or something else, to Louis Philippe, and he talked to me ever so long, and I never once remembered that he was a prince, for he talked just like any other man, and wore a plain black dress, with a red ribbon across his breast, and a silver star—the cross of the Legion of Honor, Rex told me afterward. Oh, he was such a nice old gentleman; and the Princess Adele Montcontour was there—and the loveliest creature I ever saw, the Countess Avioli, the widow of an Italian nobleman, who is staying in Paris just now. She has promised to come and see me, and I have fallen in love with her at first sight. She is an English lady, I believe, or at least she has been educated in England, and they say she is a great friend of the empress. That reminds me, I am to be presented at court next week. And *such* a white satin dress I am having made, with a long train of white velvet—the dress

to be embroidered in set figures of small diamonds, so that whenever I turn there will be such a sparkling that I expect to dazzle myself. But *revenons à nos moutons*, I must tell you about a famous English duchess whom I routed with great slaughter. You must know, she and I are rivals—that is to say, she has been all the rage here, and I, Ida Delamere, resolved to dethrone her. Saucy of me, wasn't it? but, you see, I am only sixteen, and she is twice as old, so I have the advantage of youth, and that, Angie, is nine points of the question. So, when we were introduced to-night, she stared at me with her hard, glittering eyes, and said something so rude that it set my blood boiling in my veins. So I put on the most impertinent look you can imagine, and said something just twice as insolent. You should have seen her color up, and Madame d'Ancour told me afterward she was glad of it. She never looked at me again—the fat duchess, I mean—the whole evening. Wasn't it splendid?

"But you forgot to tell me about the lame puppy in your letter. Does he limp as much as he did? I shall bring him a beautiful collar when I come home. I sent a box, by express, yesterday, to Deepdale, with a set of decorated china for your mother, and a package of books which Rex picked out expressly for Papa Gresham. And there is a big doll for you, with a little trunk and *trousseau*, all complete, and a blue silk dress for Eleanor, just the color of her eyes, and a revolver for Monty, and a box of carved chessmen for James. Oh, and a casket of bonbons! I don't think they are really so nice as the striped Jackson balls we used to buy at the store, but they are tied with white satin ribbon, and look very elegant. When the box was all packed, and Rex was closing it up—I know you won't laugh at me—but I sat down on the floor, and cried, with my cheek lying on the direction:

"'Reverend Milo Gresham,
"'Deepdale Rectory, Deepdale, Conn,'

for I felt such a thrill of homesickness, and as if I must creep into the box myself and be carried with the doll and the bonbons back to dear old Deepdale. Sometimes I fancy that Paris, and the new chocolate-colored carriage and Rex are only one of my day-dreams that Papa Gresham used to shake his head at so solemnly, and that I shall rouse up presently to find myself sitting on the window-sill, with my sewing in my lap, and Marguerite propped up in the corner beside me. I am very, very happy here; there is nothing but pleasure and amusement from one day to another. And Rex loves me so

dearly that everything I do or say is right in his eyes; and it seems as if I had Aladdin's lamp to supply every wish and anticipate every thought; but sometimes—(I wonder if it is wrong, Angie?)—I feel as if I should like to be like Cinderella, to throw the glass slipper away, and come back to the chimney-corner again. I get almost tired of Rex and his devotion once in awhile. I wish he wouldn't follow me so, and keep asking me whether I am too warm or too cold. I am downright cross with him sometimes, and then I get by myself, and cry, to think how wicked I am growing. I wonder if all wives feel so?

"Angie, don't let any one see this letter. I could not have written so to your mother or Eleanor, or any one in the world but yourself; but you know we were always allies, and even though I know you can not understand all this, it is a relief to me to sit down and write it to you.

"Give ten thousand kisses to them all at Deepdale, not forgetting Marguerite, and Jane Ann (the French doll's name is Celestine), and the lame puppy, and Jowler, and everybody; and be sure that there is nobody in the world who loves you half so well, dear, darling little Angie, as

"Your own, own
"IDA."

This was the letter written to her little friend by the child-wife, sitting in her luxurious *fauteuil*, in the superb rooms of her Parisian abiding-place; and there were the traces of tears upon the last sheet. Poor Ida!

CHAPTER XV.

GIUSEPPE.

WEARIED out by the excitement of the ball in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, and the vigil of letter-writing which succeeded it, Ida slept late the next morning, and it was nearly noon when at length she opened her eyes.

The curtains were closely drawn, and Mathilde was sitting before the fire, waiting until it should be her mistress's pleasure to rise.

"Is it late, Mathilde?"

"It is a quarter of twelve, madame."

"Has my husband breakfasted?"

"Long ago, madame; he was obliged to go to the American minister's on business, and he desired me not to disturb madame."

"That was like Rex, so thoughtful and considerate always," thought Ida, as she lay watching the blaze and crackle of the fire.

"I would not have awakened madame to tell her of it," went on Mathilde, "but there is a person here to see her. He waits now, in the *portière* down-stairs."

"A man, Mathilde? Who is it?"

"He would not give his name, madame; he said his business was pressing, and concerned you alone."

"I wonder what it can be?" pondered Ida. "However, you may bring my things, Mathilde. I may as well dress at once."

The toilet of the capricious little lady was not a matter of very great rapidity, and her breakfast of chocolate and dainty French rolls followed it, so that it was nearly one o'clock before she entered her boudoir, and sent Mathilde to usher her anonymous visitor into her presence.

"Perhaps it is the diamond-setter," thought Ida, "or the man who wants to take the order about my flowers, or—"

But while her mind was yet busy in weaving vague conjectures, the door was thrown open, and Mathilde retired, after showing in a tall, softly stepping man, in a suit of seedy black and a neatly tied white cravat.

"Giuseppe Antonardi!"

The words broke almost involuntarily from Ida's lips as she sat gazing on this unexpected apparition—an unwelcome link between her life in the past and present.

He bowed low and obsequiously.

"I am glad the signora remembers me," he said.

"But I don't remember you pleasantly at all," said Ida, with more truth than conventionality. "What have you come to see me for? You might have been quite sure that I did not want to see you."

"I did not know that I have been so unfortunate as to offend the signora," returned Giuseppe, with drooping head and an ostentatious humility of tone.

"You were always offending me—you and Mr. Pierre," said Ida, brusquely. "I suppose you have come to beg, but I shall not make myself your almoner. Take yourself off, Giuseppe—you shall not make anything out of me."

"Madame, you are mistaken; I do not come to beg—"

"Then what *do* you come for?" demanded Ida, coolly.

"Madame, I am very poor," said Giuseppe, slowly. "The world has not treated me well. I am in debt; I must have money."

"Giuseppe," said Ida, "I would give a five-franc piece to any poor beggar in the street, but I would not bestow a sou upon you. Charity is one thing, extortion another. If you have nothing more to say, I will ring the bell for Achille to show you to the door."

Giuseppe's face darkened to a dull mahogany color.

"But I have something more to say, madame; I have a great deal to say."

"Say it, then, and quickly."

"I do not speak unrewarded. My speech is like marketable wares—it will bring its worth in solid gold pieces."

"It will bring you to the street outside in charge of a *gendarme*, if you are not careful," cried Ida, growing fairly exasperated. "What do you take me for, Giuseppe, to listen to such insolence?"

Her eyes sparkled; round spots of crimson glowed like roses on either cheek. Giuseppe watched her with ill-disguised admiration. She looked lovely thus, and Giuseppe, albeit he had no heart to speak of, had yet sufficient artistic appreciation to admire her beauty.

"What do I take you for, madame?" he repeated, slowly. "I will tell you by and by; but first, I have some trifling details of family history to communicate to you."

"Of your family history?"

"No, madame; of your own."

Ida looked at him in astonishment.

"Of my family history, Giuseppe? You must be dreaming."

"I am not dreaming, madame. You intimated, I believe, that you were not fond of my master — Monsieur Pierre L'Echelle."

"I detested him," answered Ida, with emphasis.

"That was unfortunate," said Giuseppe, with a shrug of his shoulders, "for he was your uncle."

"My uncle! Monsieur Pierre my uncle?"

"Your uncle, madame."

"It is false!" cried Ida, coloring, and then growing pale.

"I have letters and papers which would prove it in any court of law in Europe, madame."

"Well, and what then?" said Ida, after a moment or two of silence, during which she was revolving in her mind the strange tidings she had just heard. "Monsieur Pierre is dead; he can no longer rise up to claim a relationship which during his life-time he ignored."

"Yes, madame; he is dead, and that brings me back to the question you asked me, as to whom you were."

"I asked you no such question, Giuseppe."

"No matter, madame; it amounted to the same thing. You, Madame Ida Delamere, are—the daughter of a murderess!"

"Giuseppe!" gasped the girl, rising to her feet, as pale as ashes, "what do you mean?"

"I mean that your mother's was the hand that stabbed Monsieur Pierre L'Echelle to the heart the night that he died the death of a dog. The jeweled dagger that lay bloody on the floor was hers. I saw her throw it from her when the deed was done. I saw her steal from the room, noiselessly and stealthily, at the dead of night!"

"Giuseppe, you are speaking falsely!"

"Madame, I swear it before high heaven! If ever fate confronts me with that guilty woman, she will confess the deed; she dare not deny it!"

"Then, Giuseppe," slowly articulated Ida, "you lied foully in the evidence you gave at the coroner's inquest."

He shrugged his shoulders again, that little foreign movement that Ida so abhorred.

"What could I do? I was a poor man, and friendless; the L'Echelles were rich and powerful; moreover, they belong to a family that never forgive, 'Vengeance to the death' is their motto. The deed was done; all my evidence could not bring the poor victim back to life again. Moreover, madame, there was you—could I have the heart to ruin you, an innocent, harmless child, with the name of a murderer's offspring? *Per Bacco!* I may be a villain, but I am not so bad as that!"

"Giuseppe," said Ida, coldly, "this mock sentiment is wasted on me. You had your reasons for keeping this awful crime a secret, but it was not through any mercy toward me!"

"Let it be as madame pleases," said Giuseppe, quietly; "but here is what I have to tell you: You are the daughter of one who is liable, at any moment, when I choose to break the silence of years, to a death upon the gallows. You are rich, courted, and gay; you have a husband, I am told, who adores you; your carriage rolls by on the boulevards, while I trudge on foot, humble and despised; but to-day I am the wealthier of the two, for I own a secret which has power to turn your husband's love into horror, and brand you with the awful shadow of a crime which no one can ever hear named without a shudder."

Ida grew pale as he spoke, but rallied herself with an effort.

"If it is the truth, Giuseppe," she said, "and, mind you, I am myself convinced that it is a monstrous fabrication—"

"You will discover, madame, that it is too true."

"Supposing it, then, for argument's sake, to be true, why have you kept silence all these years? Why have you not spoken out your precious piece of information long ago?"

"What good would it have done me, madame? For I freely confess that if I could have found your guilty mother—and it is not from any lack of search that I have not long ago hunted her down," he added, with an evil glitter in his eyes, "I would have taxed her long ago with the crime. I would have compelled her to pay with a gold piece for every moment of my forbearing silence! But, up to this time, she has continued to elude me with a cunning that was always her inheritance—for the L'Echelles are secret as the grave, and slyer than the serpents; but never fear but I shall find her yet. Giuseppe Antonardi was once in the secret police force of Austria, and that is a training that a man never forgets. I shall find her yet! But, in the meantime—*per Bacco!*—a man must live, and I am poor! It is for money that I have come to you, and money I must have!"

"And I am to be your victim?" Ida demanded, bitterly.

"You are to be the generous recognizer of my forbearing silence, madame," said Giuseppe, smoothly.

"Giuseppe," began Ida, "it seems to me that this is a mere fabrication, from beginning to end, trumped up for the purpose of an unblushing extortion."

"As madame pleases; but if you refuse to help a poor man in his need, I shall immediately seek an interview with your husband, whose more logical nature will at once recognize the correctness and justice of my claims. He may, perchance, be surprised to learn that he has married the daughter of a murderess—"

"He will not believe you."

"Does madame think so? At all events, I am ready to risk my chances for it."

He was turning away, when Ida spoke again.

"Giuseppe, who—where is—my mother? You ought at least to tell me that!"

"As to whom she is, madame, I deem it proper to preserve my secret yet a little while longer. What good would it do you to know? And *where* she is—*Cospito!* If I knew myself, do you suppose I should be here, begging a mere

gratuity, just to keep soul and body together? Shadow of Crœsus! I should be a rich man, madame!"

Ida's trembling hand sought her purse. Giuseppe observed the motion and stopped abruptly.

"Madame has decided to take the part of wisdom," he said, insinuatingly. "Madame knows that a poor fellow can not starve!"

"I do not believe your story, Giuseppe," she said; "yet it is perhaps better that I should yield for once to your extortion." Here Giuseppe elevated his eyebrows remonstratingly. "But, remember that it is for the last time. See, here is money; do not forget that it purchases your silence!"

Giuseppe's eyes glistened as Ida poured the gold pieces into his outstretched palm.

"Madame is generous as becomes one of the race of L'Echelle," he muttered, greedily. "Henceforward my tongue and my memory become your faithful slaves. No one shall know, from this time, that such a one as Giuseppe Antonardi exists."

He crept away with the soft, leopard-like tread that Ida had remembered from a child; and the next instant she was alone —alone with the awful shadow which his disclosure had cast over her life.

She sat down again, pressing both hands over her eyes, trying to summon every faculty of her mind to the aid of the beleaguered citadel of sense and reason.

"It can not be true," she murmured; "it is too horrible!"

And yet, why should it not be true? It was not in the least unlikely that Mr. Pierre had been—as Giuseppe asserted—her uncle, else why had he taken the general charge of her, paying her bills and superintending, after his vague and unequal fashion, her childish education? But why, then, had he entertained such an inveterate dislike to her? Why did he separate her from her mother, who, according to Giuseppe's account, was living all the while? Or, was it possible—and Ida acknowledged the probability of the idea with a sick feeling of despair—that her mother had herself discarded and thrown off the holy tie of maternal tenderness? There were unfortunate children, and Ida, little as she knew of the world's vice and wickedness, was beginning to learn this, whom father and mother alike blush to recognize—children who are nameless and unacknowledged. Oh, merciful Heaven! could she be one of these? And what was the deadly feud between brother and sister which had culminated in a midnight murder?

Ida sat thinking of these things, her face buried in her

hands, taking no note of the flight of time. This was her first rough awakening to sorrow—her first actual experience of the realities of a world where pleasure's cup is seldom entirely unmingled with the bitter under-current of grief; and it was inexpressibly terrible and prostrating to the spoiled child, whose life had heretofore glided along like the enchanted lapses of a summer morning.

And for the first time she uttered that wild, wicked wish which rises, as it were, spontaneously to the lips of so many a pilgrim over earth's dreary road:

"If I could die, and hide away from it all in the grave! Oh, if I could die!"

She was roused from those wretched meditations by the sound of her husband's footsteps in the corridor without. She started up, looking wildly round, as if she fain would have fled or concealed herself from his eyes.

Notwithstanding her assertion that she did not believe Giuseppe Antonardi's tale, she would not for the world have had Reginald Delamere listen to its blighting words. No—it was a secret which, at all hazards, must be kept secret.

"Ida, my darling," Mr. Delamere exclaimed, in a voice of concern, as his eyes rested upon her pale face and swollen eyelids, "what is the matter? what has happened to disturb you?"

"Nothing—that is—I don't know, Reginald," sobbed Ida, letting her head fall upon his shoulder. "I suppose I am tired, that is all."

"Tired? Of course you are, my poor little blossom!" murmured the husband, soothingly. "Too much gayety has wearied you out; we must be more careful in future. Have you been alone all the morning?"

"Yes."

She spoke the falsehood with compressed lips, and eyes never once lifted to his face.

"Has no one been here? Not the man about the diamonds, nor Dumarte, with the imperial photographs!"

"No, Rex; no one."

"Very well. Then get ready for a drive. You need a little fresh air, and a good long rest afterward. Shall I call Mathilde?"

"If you please, Rex."

Mathilde was not in madame's bedroom, and Delamere opened the door of the dressing-room beyond, where the trim-looking French woman was at work.

"Go to your mistress, Mathilde," he said.

The girl rose, shaking her work from her lap.

"Has the visitor, then, gone who was with madame?"

"What visitor, Mathilde?"

"The man."

"Your mistress has had no visitor this morning, Mathilde."

The woman looked puzzled. She herself had shown the tall, softly stepping foreigner into Mrs. Delamere's boudoir; but she was too Parisian to insist on what her mistress evidently had chosen to conceal.

"I beg monsieur's pardon," she said; "I have been mistaken. Of course madame has had no visitor."

And she tripped away to obey her mistress's summons; while Reginald, after a momentary marvel at the girl's misapprehension, took up Galignani's "Messenger," just brought in by Achille, and began to read.

CHAPTER XVI.

PRESENTED AT COURT.

MME. AVIOLI was sitting in Mrs. Delamere's reception-room when the young wife returned from her drive. Although her dress lacked the brilliant accessories of the night before, she was as lovely as ever, in a black velvet carriage-dress, with deep-blue plumes in her velvet hat, and her India cashmere shawl, clasped with a cameo of dark, translucent stone, edged all round with tiny sea-pearls. Ida thought she looked like a picture, as she sat leaning back in the deep hollow of the sofa with a book in her hand. She rose, as Ida ran up to her, both hands stretched out, in the bright gladness of her welcome.

"Ah, *mia carissima*," she said, smiling, "I have waited long for you. What! you will give me a kiss?"

"Ah, yes," pleaded Ida, holding up her lips like two cherries. "I always want to kiss people that I love."

"And you love me already, *mia*, is that it?"

"Indeed I do. Sit down again, and talk to me."

The countess obeyed, and looked keenly into Ida's face.

"You are pale, little one, your eyes are heavy. Ah, this is a world of compensation! and you are paying for the triumphs of last evening."

"No," said Ida, throwing aside the bonnet, whose strings she had untied; "it is not that, Madame—"

"Call me Lucille, *carissima*—that is the name I should best like to hear from your lips."

"Well, then, if I may be Ida, too."

"Ida?" the soft syllable rippled like music from Mme. Avioli's mouth. "It is a sweet name, and I like it—Ida. But what were you about to tell me—of those weary eyes and colorless cheeks?"

"Nothing, except that we can not always be happy."

"Ah, *mia poverina*, you have found that out already?"

"I suppose so," said Ida, slowly.

"You are right, Ida. Life is not all sunshine and roses," said Mme. Avioli, stroking the small hand which she held in hers. "There are troubles, however, which grow less when confided to some faithful bosom."

"Mine is not one of that kind," said Ida, recoiling at the very idea of revealing to any living soul the awful secret which she had that morning learned. "Not," she added quickly remembering herself, "that I have any serious trouble—only—only, you know, one is naturally capricious and changeable at times."

"True," assented the countess. "But, to leave these shadows, which are as vague as they are indescribable, you promised to tell me all about yourself and your American home. I like to hear of lives so different from my own. Speak to me, my heart, as if you were speaking to yourself."

And Ida, coming close to the countess's knee, and nestling down on a low velvet divan, so that she could hold her visitor's hand, told of Deepdale Rectory and the sunny years of her childhood, growing interested and eager as she went on. Had it been the day before, Ida would have spoken of her previous life, of M. Pierre and the strange, roving character of her earlier years; but now she could scarcely tell herself why she carefully avoided any word or allusion which should lead to those times.

Mme. Avioli listened with interest almost as absorbed as that of the fair young speaker.

"The good priest!" she cried, when Ida humorously described the peculiarities of the Reverend Milo Gresham. "How I should have liked to know him!"

"Not priest, madame; he was a clergyman."

"It is all the same, *mia!* And the demoiselle with the blue eyes and the gentle voice, whose *fiancé* proved recreant and fell in love with you!"

"It is all right once more," said Ida, eagerly. "They will soon be engaged, and he will forget me, as if I had never lived."

"Yes," said Mme. Avioli, a little bitterly, "that is the way

of men. But it will not be so, *cara*, with your husband, the beautiful boy, with the dark-blue eyes. It is plain to see how devoted he is to you."

Ida drew herself up slightly.

"He is not a boy, madame—he is past nineteen."

Mme. Avioli laughed musically.

"Don't be offended, Ida, but what is that but a boy? My husband, when he died—the saints be merciful to his soul—was seventy, and past. Do not look so shocked, my child. It is true that I did not marry him for love—but we manage these things differently on the Continent. I was alone and poor, with high lineage to support, and people said not without beauty. What would my life have been alone? The Count Avioli was good to me; he proved a noble and generous husband, and I was a faithful wife all the years of our union—as faithful, Ida, as if I had loved him with boy-and-girl enthusiasm. And when he died he left me wealth and independence, and the name of madame, which secures me the freedom I so pined for as a girl. It was not romantic, but *que voulez vous!* it is not everybody who runs away, and is married among the roses at sixteen, like you, *ma petite!*"

Mme. Avioli's visit was prolonged far beyond the period prescribed by fashion, and when she went away, Ida begged her soon to return.

"I don't know what makes me love you so much," she said, wistfully; "but I feel as if you were my sister!"

Mme. Avioli pressed the soft hand of the young wife in her own.

"Sister," she repeated, gently; "that is a happy thought of yours, Ida. We *will* be sisters!"

So began Mrs. Delamere's first friendship in Paris.

When the day for her much anticipated presentation at court arrived, Ida looked like a fairy in the midst of a snow-wreath in the dress Mlle. Micharde had sent home in a box large enough for a trunk. It was, as she had written to Angie Gresham, of white satin, embroidered with floss silk butterflies, each crested with the glitter of tiny diamonds, fastened by some mysterious triumph of the jeweler's art into the satin, and a long train of pure white velvet, while a point lace scarf was fastened picturesquely over one shoulder and under the other, and clasped with a diamond brooch on the top. She wore nothing in her curls but a natural white rose, with its accompanying spray of green leaves; and the magnificent solitaire diamonds, which had been her bridal gift from her

husband, shone like spots of quivering fire on her breast and in either ear.

"How do you like me, Rex?" she cried, running gleefully into her husband's dressing-room. "Oh, how funny you look in your court suit! Your carriage is here; mine doesn't come until afterward."

"Aren't we going together?" demanded Mr. Delamere, in some bewilderment.

"Going together, indeed! That's a man's idea!" laughed Ida. "Why, there isn't a carriage in all Paris large enough to hold us both!"

"Does that court costume of yours take up so much room?" demanded the young husband, somewhat amused.

"To be sure it does. Come, make haste—it is getting late!"

The presentation room at the palace was already full when Mr. and Mrs. Delamere arrived, and Ida, leaning on her husband's arm and courteously conveyed by the American minister, passed through the glittering aisle of beauty and fashion, her heart throbbing, perhaps, a degree or two more rapidly than usual, yet quite self-possessed, and even a little defiant. Wasn't she, in right of her Republicanism, as royal a lady as any one of them? And, moreover, a queen in her youth and loveliness?

As she swept along, she caught the bold, suspicious eye of her old enemy, the Duchess of Bernmouth; and, if possible, held her pretty head more erect on that account.

The empress stood at the end of the room a little on one side, surrounded by a small but brilliant circle of ladies and gentlemen, and dressed in a lilac velvet robe, trimmed with Chantilly lace, and a shawl, of the same costly material, sweeping down from her shoulders, while her fair, high-bred face, not, perhaps, so youthful-looking as it was when she was the boast of all Europe, but still marvelously delicate in outline and fresh complexion, was relieved by the golden hair, which brushed back from the brows, fell in a cascade of shining curls at the back of her head.

Ida bowed low over the delicate gloved hand of the first lady in France, as the courteous representative of the transatlantic Republic pronounced her name, and then, after a sweet and graciously spoken word or two from the empress, which she hardly heard in the excitement of the moment, moved on to make room for a fat lady from Chicago, whose face was the color of her crimson satin dress, and whose

gloves, from undue pressure and nervousness, were split halfway up the palm.

When at length the presentations from Yankee land were over, and while the English minister stood respectfully awaiting her majesty's permission to introduce the ladies from his own aristocratic isle, the empress turned smilingly to Mr. ——, the American Minister:

"So that is *la belle Americaine,* of whom I have heard so much!" she said, with a gracious glance toward Mrs. Delamere, who was standing at some little distance. "For once the tongue of rumor has not been false. You may tell your fair countrywoman, monsieur, that Eugenie thinks her face the loveliest that has lighted up St. Cloud this season. *Ciel!* but it must be sweet to be so young and so beautiful!"

And with a sigh, perhaps given to the memory of her own departed youth and loveliness, Eugenie turned toward Lord Edenbourne, and a second series of presentations followed.

The Duchess of Bernmouth assumed her sweetest air of grace and languor, as she bent before the empress, but Eugenie had no special word of compliment for the fat blonde with the dazzling shoulders and the *parure* of Neapolitan coral. Since she had been defeated by the styleless little girl with the bold black eyes, and the complexion of a Spanish creole, Lady Bernmouth could have gnashed her beautiful white teeth as she thought of it. And when, a few hours later, the report of the compliment Mrs. Delamere had received from the august lips of royalty itself was ringing through every drawing-room in the gay world of Paris, Lady Bernmouth actually cried.

"I am tired of this horrid Paris," she exclaimed, when questioned by the much astonished duke as to the cause of her tears. "Let's go on to Rome to-morrow."

"Not until after the ball at the palace, my dear."

"Well," said Lady Bernmouth, wiping away her tears, as the judicious after-thought occurred to her that a red nose and swelled eyelids were not beneficial to the prettiest of faces, "we'll wait for the ball at the palace. Do you suppose that horrid upstart little American will be there?"

"I don't know; I should suppose so, after what her imperial majesty said about her beauty."

"I'll have one more trial before I'll be stared down by those bold black eyes," said Lady Bernmouth, energetically.

She drove to Mlle. Micharde's that very afternoon, and was closeted with the fashionable *modiste* for over an hour, giving her what she called "the rough idea" of an unapproachable

toilet of rose du Chine silk, which was to dazzle the world at the approaching palace ball.

But as the days passed by no card of invitation arrived. Lady Bernmouth marveled at the delay, and at length decided so far to ignore her pride as to consult a fitting authority on the subject, Mme. la Marquise de Beaumont, who was cousin to M. Partier, whose sister was the Comtesse d'Elemonde, one of the ladies-in-waiting to the empress.

"I suppose the list of invitations to the ball isn't made out yet?" she said, casually, to Mme. la Marquise.

"My dear," said the marquise, "it was made out long ago."

"Then what do you suppose was the reason I haven't received mine?" asked Lady Bernmouth, quite forgetting her diplomacy in her eager anxiety.

"Oh," said Mme. de Beaumont, quite enjoying Lady Bernmouth's face, "your name is not on the list. There are so many English in Paris just now, of course her majesty must make a selection."

"Not on the list?"

"No; I'm sure of it. Marie d'Elemonde told me herself, and she saw the names."

Lady Bernmouth had grown first livid and then green as she sat twisting the emerald and diamond rings on her plump fingers.

"Is—is that pert little Mrs. Delamere's name down?" she asked, in a choking voice, as if the necklace of Neapolitan coral were too tight.

"Oh, yes," Mme. de Beaumont answered, promptly; "her name is first on the American list!"

Lady Bernmouth never mentioned the subject again, but left Paris the next morning, taking the rose du Chine dress with her. Three times had she been defeated in a fair field of battle by a chit of sixteen, a plain *Mrs.*, with nothing on earth but a round, dimpled face, and, Lady Bernmouth vindictively added, "impudence enough for a dozen."

The Duchess of Bernmouth had no mind to risk another such signal discomfiture. As for our little Ida, she, in the royal sway of youth and beauty, and the intoxicating atmosphere of adulation which surrounded her, would scarcely have envied the empress's self the diadem that crowned her beautiful brow, if it had not been for one shadow, which, like that of Mordecai in the king's gate, came perpetually between her and the sunshine of her happiness—Giuseppe Antonardi.

For, not content with what she had so generously given, he

came again and again, claiming yet more as his right, and growing insolent in proportion as he succeeded in working more and more upon her feelings. His face haunted her as she drove along the fashionable avenues—she saw him lurking around her door as she alighted from the carriage; he followed her everywhere like a shadow.

"I shall appeal to the police if this persecution is continued," she cried, passionately, to him one day.

"Appeal, then, madame," Giuseppe replied, with a mock sort of humility. "I place no restraint upon you."

And Ida bit her lips until the blood came, to think how utterly powerless she was in the hands of this villain.

"I could almost murder you when you look at me in that evil way," she said, as Giuseppe watched her, under his sly, cat-like lids.

"It is easy for the L'Echelles to commit murder!" he said, lightly. "I can believe you, lady."

And Ida, between the sickening aversion she felt to the man himself, and the fear lest, in some of his persistent visits, Reginald Delamere should encounter him, was nearly frantic.

"Go now!" she said, hurriedly, counting out money, "that is all I have got to-day."

Giuseppe's brow darkened.

"This—it is a mere trifle!"

"It is all I have, I tell you."

"I must have more."

Ida knew the firm, metallic voice too well to parley longer. Her husband's carriage was driving up at the same moment. She tore a diamond ring from her finger and tossed it into his palm.

"Take that!" she said, checking his rapture of thanks with a gesture of disgust. "Go to Mathilde, and tell her to let you out at the back entrance—quickly!"

If she could have seen the smile on Giuseppe's face as he obeyed her hurried words!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SHADOW OF CHANGE.

The ball at the Tuileries, although Ida Delamere was not at the time aware of it, was yet another stone, placed by the hands of the Master Artificer, Destiny, on the edifice of her fate. She had looked so pale and wearied all the day long, that Reginald had hesitated as to the propriety of her going when at length the hour came for her to dress.

But her child-like coaxings, and earnest entreaties finally prevailed; and when he saw her enter the room in a dress of white silk, covered with floating skirts of tulle, which made her look like a snow-cloud, while her cheeks glowed like carnations, and her eyes were softly brilliant, he could not but tell himself that her lack of health and spirits was nothing more than distorted fancy on his part.

"That dress is like white fringes of sea-foam, Ida," he said, smilingly, as he rose to lead her down to the carriage, "and your pearls somehow add to the illusion. You will assuredly be the belle of the room; but remember not to flirt!"

He spoke in jest, and she made some light answer, as she took up the bouquet of white roses and japonicas, which had just been sent in, wrapped in silver paper, and tied in a box, from the fashionable florist of Paris.

The superb rooms at the palace were already thronged when Mrs. Delamere entered, and she had the satisfaction of being the cynosure of all eyes, partly for her own surpassing beauty, partly on account of the unusual compliment which had been accorded to her by the empress. The requests for introductions followed one after another with bewildering rapidity, and Ida found herself almost, as if by magic, the belle of the evening.

She enjoyed it with the fervor and intensity belonging to her years; and *passée* beauties, whose lives had been passed in the shadow of royalty could not but smile to see the innocent happiness of this lovely, bright-eyed child.

Presently Mme. Avioli brought up a friend of hers from Scotland, and begged to be allowed to introduce "Mr. St. Argyle." He was a tall, handsome man, with regular features and large hazel eyes. But the chief beauty of his face lay in his mouth, carved in red flexible lines, and shaded by a silky brown mustache. His dress, the uniform of a colonel in some Scottish regiment, was picturesque in the extreme, from the plaided scarf at his belt to the claymore hanging at his side. Moreover, what was of considerably more consequence, his manners were soft and fascinating enough to charm a much more fastidious beauty than our little Ida.

There was more than one meaning glance exchanged among the assembled guests at the desperate flirtation at once inaugurated between Colonel St. Argyle and the beautiful Mrs. Delamere. Reginald himself, though he smiled at it at first, could not long blind himself to the fact that his pretty wife was playing the coquette.

"Ida," he whispered to her, as she passed him, leaning on

Colonel St. Argyle's arm, "the band is striking up a waltz—will you give it to me?"

"I can't, Rex," she answered, in the same tone; "I've promised to waltz with Colonel St. Argyle."

Mr. Delamere's brow darkened.

"You have danced with him often enough, Ida," he said, in a tone of censure.

"I am the best judge of that myself, Reginald," she answered, haughtily.

"I request that you will not dance with him again."

"But, Reginald, I have promised."

"Once, then—but not oftener!"

Delamere turned gloomily away, while Ida, smiling an affirmative to Colonel St. Argyle's whispered question as to whether she was ready, floated away on his arm to the enchanting music of the imperial band.

"Rex needn't be so cross!" thought Ida, with a little pout; "and now to punish him, I'll keep my engagement card for the rest of the evening."

Ida kept her word. Between Colonel St. Argyle, several agreeable young French officers of the imperial household, an English baronet, and a bevy of New Yorkers, she had not a word nor a look for Reginald, and finished the evening with a dizzy rapid redowa, danced with Colonel St. Argyle.

Reginald, hurt and wounded by his wife's thoughtless conduct, uttered not a single word as the carriage rolled homeward in the gray of the morning.

"You don't ask me what sort of an evening I've had," said Ida, breaking a long silence at length.

"I did not think it necessary," was the dry reply.

"And why not?"

"Because you seemed to be enjoying yourself to the top of your bent."

"So I was," said Ida, mischievously. "Colonel St. Argyle is delightful, and as for that dear little Monsieur Estenierre, I never waltzed with so perfect a dancer in my life."

Reginald did not answer, but looked intently out of the window.

"Rex," cried Ida, "how silly you are!"

"I am obliged to you for your good opinion!" was the somewhat bitter reply.

"As if a husband and wife could dance together all the evening. That isn't the style at all to play Darby and Joan."

"Not at all," answered Reginald, coldly. "The fashionable code holds that the society of any brainless fop, who wears

a sword and sash, or carries an order on his breast, is preferable to that of one's husband, and you are acting up to its rules and regulations."

"Rex, you are jealous."

"Not in the least. I fully recognize your right to be a fashionable wife if you choose."

"What did you bring me to Paris for, then?"

"To enjoy yourself."

"Yes, and set yourself deliberately to work to prevent my doing anything of the sort by a regular system of espionage."

"If enjoying yourself means deliberate flirtation with other gentlemen, Ida, you can hardly blame me!"

"Then I suppose you will be very much mortified when I tell you that Colonel St. Argyle is coming to-morrow to drive me out with his cream-colored ponies?"

"Ida!"

"Well, why shouldn't I go? Where's the harm? Madame Avioli went with him last week, and Lady Bernmouth but a little while ago."

Reginald sat silent.

"Rex," persisted Ida, "don't you wish me to go?"

She laid her gloved hand on his arm. The warm, wayward little heart was beginning to melt beneath its crust of caprice and willfulness. Had Reginald said, in his old, loving tone, "Ida, do not go," she would have given up her appointment in an instant But, alas! that we can not read the secrets to one another's hearts.

Reginald had heard only defiance and contempt of his wishes in her tones.

"You can do precisely as you please," was his cold answer, and Ida sat back in her corner of the carriage, feeling that she was rebuffed.

"I *will* go now, at all events," was her internal resolution.

And she kept her word, the next day, being out all the morning with Colonel St. Argyle and the cream-colored ponies, while Reginald, sitting at home by his lonely fireside, mused within himself as to whether he had not committed an act that was cruelly unjust to Ida, as well as to himself, when he led her to the altar of the little stone church at Lennoxville six months ago.

"She was too young to know whether she loved me or not," he thought, bitterly, "and I—good heavens! what is to become of me if—"

And then his head sunk on his hands—the picture was too heart-breaking for his mind's eye calmly to contemplate.

"She does love me—she *must* love me," he thought, "or my life will not be worth a straw's weight to me."

It was late in the day when Ida returned, and she was not alone. One or two gay young French gentlemen accompanied her, and she induced them to remain and dine with her.

"Mr. Delamere will be delighted," she said, with a glance in the direction of her husband; and Reginald could not but join in the invitation his wife had so recklessly given, little as his heart coincided with the mechanical words he spoke.

He was inexpressibly annoyed at this new freak of Ida's. Had she returned alone, they would have been reconciled ere this; for his heart was full of tenderness toward her, and regret for the seeming unkindness of his manner the night before.

But these Frenchmen, with their conversational chat, and idle, meaningless laughter, had come in between the electric current of his heart and hers. Well, if Ida preferred the society of these popinjays to his—and then Reginald checked himself. Yes, Ida was right; he was growing bitter and exacting. It was no wonder she wearied of him; perhaps it would have been better that they had never met.

"Ida," he said, when they had at length taken leave, "shall we go to the Louvre to-morrow?"

"Thank you," said Ida, suppressing a yawn; "but I don't care to go to the Louvre to-morrow."

"If Colonel St. Argyle had asked you," bitterly rejoined Reginald, "you would have accepted the invitation at once."

"Perhaps I might," said Ida, carelessly.

"Am I, then, less to you than Colonel St. Argyle?"

"You are more—a great deal more, Rex," laughed Ida, rather in mischief than malice. "That is, you scold more, and can be infinitely more disagreeable."

"And does it never occur to you that you yourself are not absolutely perfect?"

"If it doesn't, it is not for lack of being told of it."

Reginald was silent and annoyed. This flippant mood was something as new as it was repellant in Ida.

"By the way, Rex," she said, after a few moments, during which not a word was spoken on either side, "we are going to get up a carriage-party to Madame Latour's chateau, a little way out of Paris. Do you want to join us?"

"'We'? And whom may 'we' mean?"

"Myself, of course," with a purse up of the mouth, "and Madame Avioli, and Madame d'Ancour, and Mr. Armaud, and Colonel St. Argyle—"

Reginald interrupted her at this point.

"Do you mean that the party is absolutely made up, Ida?"

"I believe so," she answered.

"And who was to be your escort?" he asked.

"Colonel St. Argyle, of course," said Ida, saucily.

"Leaving me quite out of the question," rejoined Delamere. "Upon my word, Mrs. Delamere, you are acquiring the habits of free-and-easy Parisian ladies with a facility which is really admirable!"

Ida colored indignantly.

"'Free-and-easy'? I am at a loss to understand your meaning, Reginald."

"And I yours. Perhaps it is scarcely worth while to discuss the matter, as our opinions differ so widely."

"Rex, you are getting intolerable. Do you expect me to tell people, on receiving an invitation, that I can not accept it until I go home and ask my husband's permission? The cruelest of domestic tyrants can not wish that the marks of his claims should be visible to the whole world."

Reginald laughed hoarsely.

"You are very complimentary to me, Ida."

Ida rose and left the room—perhaps the wisest thing she could have done, in her then state of temper, and nothing more was said on the obnoxious subject.

Reginald Delamere joined the carriage-party to the old chateau, but he evidently did not enjoy the expedition, nor did Ida. But she had, at all events, one satisfaction—that of having her own way.

"Rex is only a little cross and out of sorts," thought the young wife; "he'll come around all right; at any rate I am not going to coax and wheedle him. He may as well learn, first as last, that these petty jealousies are too ridiculous for me to notice."

And so the breach went on, widening and widening until the momentary distance, which a single loving word or kiss might have spanned at first, became deep and wide as a black-waved gulf whose waters are shadowed by eternal night. Reginald Delamere's nature, originally frank and trusting in no ordinary degree, was becoming warped under the pressure of this unnatural atmosphere of doubt and dread. Words and looks, which he would not have noticed at another time, became freighted with deep meaning and cruel satire. Ida's slightest and most unconsidered actions were judged according to this Procrustean rule, and the verdict was one and the same at all time:

"She does not love me! She has discovered, at length, that she has a heart, and—woe is me!—that heart is not mine!"

The natural consequence of this constant wearing and fretting of the nervous system was a coldness and irritability, which Ida saw with surprise, but her youth and inexperience supplied her with no panacea for this strange, mental disease.

"It will be all right after awhile, I dare say," she comforted herself by thinking; "but oh! it is horribly disagreeable!"

In the meantime, while Reginald Delamere fancied himself the most miserable man on the face of the earth, Ida had trials and annoyances of her own which he had not the slightest conception of.

Giuseppe's requisitions were growing more and more exorbitant; and Ida, whose morbid fears of the disclosure of his fatal secret increased with every hour in which she allowed herself to muse upon the hideous rampart of circumstantial evidence he had built up around her, had already parted, with Mathilde's help, with many valuable articles of jewelry and bijouterie, to supply his greedy demands, and began to feel an absolute dread of returning from a drive or walk, lest she should see his stealthy form lurking near her residence, or emerging from a gate-way, sudden and sly as an emissary from the Evil One. Sometimes she resolved to tell Reginald all, and defy Giuseppe to do his worst—but her courage failed her at this idea.

"Reginald," she said one evening as she was unclasping the necklace of pearls she had worn at a large dinner-party, "do you think it is right to judge children for the fault of their parents?"

"What do you mean?"

"Suppose a young man were engaged to a girl, and were to find that her father"—Ida had not the courage to put the case in any more parallel form—"had committed a terrible crime. In that case, ought he to marry her, or break the engagement?"

"He would be justified in breaking the engagement, of course."

Ida's heart sunk within her.

"But why? Surely it would be no fault of the girl?" she persisted.

"No, not primarily; but you don't reflect how often vice and depravity are handed down, as a natural blood-inheritance, from generation to generation."

"Reginald, I think that is very unjust," protested Ida, eagerly.

"Unjust, perhaps, but a perfectly natural inference," he answered, indifferently.

Ida said nothing more, and Reginald never dreamed how cruelly he had hurt and disappointed her. There was no very perceptible change about her, except, perhaps, a little more shrinking in his presence, which he, not unnaturally, construed into growing aversion; but Ida entertained no more thoughts of taking her husband into her confidence. Giuseppe's mouth must be sealed now at all events.

"The daughter of a murderess," she kept repeating to herself, amid the gayest scenes, and when her face wore its brightest smiles. "Oh, what would he say if he knew?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE HUSBAND'S JEALOUSY.

THINGS were in this position when one afternoon Reginald Delamere returned from a drive by himself; for Ida had gone out earlier on a shopping expedition with Mme. d'Ancour, who was delighted to be seen in public with *la belle Americaine*, and had cared for no other society. But he had not enjoyed the drive, for when the mind is moody and preoccupied, Nature's sweetest influences appeal to it in vain.

As he entered the pretty apartment, which served as anteroom or vestibule to the larger drawing-room, Mlle. Mathilde started from her seat near the fire.

"If monsieur pleases, madame is engaged of the most particular—if monsieur would but wait a moment!"

She opened the door into a side-room as she spoke, as if expecting him to enter it.

"Engaged, Mathilde?"

"Yes, monsieur; it would be but for the space of one little moment."

And Reginald, taking no notice of the girl's flushed face and embarrassed air, went into the side-room, and throwing himself into a chair, took up a magazine which lay on the table.

Probably, he told himself, it was some dress-maker or sewing-woman, to whom Ida was giving a private conference, and it made little difference where he bestowed himself for five or ten minutes.

At all events, he was glad that she had returned home.

Her absence of late had grown so constant and habitual that it was rather unusual to find her at her own fireside.

As he sat there, reading now and then a stray sentence from the pages before him, but oftener indulging in his own morbid reflections, the door of Ida's drawing-room opened, and a swift footstep crossed the anteroom and went out.

Not the footsteps of a woman. No! the color ebbed away from Reginald's cheeks as he recognized the unmistakable tread of a man.

Springing to his feet, he rushed into the anteroom, and would have opened the outer door had not Mlle. Mathilde thrown herself before it in an affrighted sort of way.

"Monsieur wants something? What is it that I caught?"

"Stand out of the way!" was the answer ejaculated under her master's breath.

"Monsieur is ill, surely," Mathilde cried, but she stepped back from the door notwithstanding; and Reginald, throwing it open, ran down-stairs.

But the halls and staircases were empty and deserted—the old *portière* was not in her room, but came up the lower stairway as Reginald stood looking round.

"Ah! what was it, then, that monsieur would have?" demanded the garrulous old woman. A thousand pardons that she was absent when monsieur did her the honor to descend; she had but stepped below to look at the *pot au feu*, and—No, Reginald wanted nothing but to know who it was had just gone out.

Mme. Anastase maintained that nobody had gone out. There was the key on the table—was it then that people could fly through key-holes?

Monsieur must see that it was simply impossible.

"Then who was it, Anastase, that went up to my wife's room?"

"When, monsieur?"

"I can't tell exactly when; some time in the course of the afternoon."

Anastase shook her head reflectively.

"No one, monsieur."

Anastase was quite sure of this; and Reginald, annoyed and unsatisfied, was compelled once more to return upstairs.

Ida sat at the table as he entered the drawing-room. Her upward glance had, to his prejudiced imagination, something of defiance in it.

"Ida," he said, walking straight up to her, "who has been with you?"

"My dress-maker—a woman from Mademoiselle Micharde."

"It was no woman that just went out, Ida. Do you think I do not know a man's footstep when I hear it?"

"Just now?"

Her large eyes looked up into his face with the startled expression of a deer brought finally to bay. She clasped her hands as if she would have pleaded for mercy.

"Ida," he said, in a husky voice, "I insist upon knowing who this man was."

"Then you can not know."

There are points in the chase when the most timid animal will turn desperately upon its pursuers, and Ida had reached this point.

"Ida!"

"I refuse to answer your question!" she cried, desperately. "You have no right to catechize me thus—to spy upon all my actions as if I were an escaped criminal!"

Her cheek grew pale as ashes, as she pronounced the last words, and she shuddered as if a chill had passed over her.

Reginald stood gazing down upon her, scarcely crediting the evidence of his own senses.

"Ida," he began, slowly, "what does this mean?"

"I told you I should answer none of your questions."

"Then, what inferences am I to draw?" he asked, with flashing eyes.

"What you please!" she said, passionately. "I am past caring now!"

"Ida, was it Colonel St. Argyle?"

A sudden flush came to her cheeks—in the imminence of the actual danger she had never once imagined the course which his suspicions, steered by the unreasoning helm of jealousy, might take! Colonel St. Argyle! Well, perhaps, it were better that he should be allowed to entertain these groundless fancies for awhile. Some explanation she must accord to him—and anything—anything to keep him from ever approaching the dreadful secret of Giuseppe Antonardi.

She sat in silence as these reflections passed hurriedly through her mind—and every second during which she uttered no refutation to the charge added to the array of evidence which was gradually accumulating against her, in her husband's passion-fevered mind.

"I repeat, Ida," he said, "was this mysterious visitor Colonel St. Argyle?"

"You insult me by the question, Reginald."

"And you insult me still more by your silence!" he cried, passionately.

"Even if it were, is there any harm in my receiving a gentleman visitor in my own drawing-room, at this period of the day?"

Reginald hesitated. He could not say absolutely that there was, yet in his eyes the whole thing, from beginning to end, was lacking in discretion and decency.

"There must be harm in an interview from which your husband is excluded," he said, after a minute's reflection.

"Excluded, Reginald! I was not aware that you were excluded!"

"Was it not by your orders that Mathilde requested me to wait in the cedar-room until your visitor was gone?"

"No—certainly not!"

"Then how do you account for the girl's conduct?"

"I am not responsible for all of Mathilde's freaks!" Ida answered, with some asperity.

"Mathilde!"

Mr. Delamere opened the door, and called the French woman.

In she came, glancing warily from her master to her mistress.

"Mathilde," began the former, "why were you so anxious that your mistress should not be intruded upon just now?"

"Anxious? I was not anxious, monsieur. Only I supposed that madame would rather not be disturbed!"

"You received no orders from your mistress, then?"

"No, monsieur—certainly not."

"You may go, Mathilde."

For Reginald Delamere, unreasonable and jealous as he was, was still too much of a gentleman to strive to obtain any further information by questioning his wife's servant.

Ida looked at him with flashing eyes and cheeks dyed of the deepest crimson as Mathilde softly closed the door behind her.

"I hope you are satisfied now," she said, bitterly. "It is a gentlemanly and a considerate thing, is it not, to lower your wife in the eyes of her own domestics?"

For a moment Reginald himself was shocked at this new view of his conduct, but the sullen spirit of recrimination took possession of him again in an instant.

"And do you think that I am in any way dignified by this conduct of yours?"

"We will not discuss it further, Reginald," she said, rising

with a weary look; "it is time for me to dress for dinner. We are to have company."

"As usual."

"Yes, as usual," she said, taking no notice of the implied taunt; "Mrs. Longsdale is to be here and Lady Helen Dalton and Monsieur de Ramirou and the two Mrs. Jeffersons."

Reginald looked somewhat mollified. At all events, the obnoxious Colonel St. Argyle was not to be of the party. When Ida descended to her drawing-room once more, she appeared to unusual advantage—or as least so Reginald thought. A dress of peach-colored moiré antique, with draperies of costly white lace festooned over it, cut low in the corsage, and a puffed berthe of white illusion, half hiding, half revealing the lovely dimpled shoulders, which were like a child's, formed the costume she had chosen for this special occasion, while a bunch of artificial peach-blossoms in her hair, so delicate that they almost simulated nature, was confined by a fillet of white ribbons whose ends fluttered on her shoulder.

In old times—or in times but a few days removed—Mrs. Delamere would have danced up to her husband, laughingly demanding his opinion of her evening-dress; and then, this momentous question settled, would probably have seated herself on a footstool at his knee, or perhaps climbed into his lap to have what she merrily termed "a good old chat," until such time as the arrival of her guests transformed her back again into the demurest of little hostesses.

Now, however, things were different, and Reginald felt the change painfully.

Ida walked toward the fire, the long trail of her peach-colored moiré rustling softly over the carpet behind her, and, seating herself in a low velvet *fauteuil*, took up a newspaper.

He paced slowly up and down the room, his hands clasped behind him and his head slightly depressed, while the ticking of the little gilded mantel clock was all that broke the oppressive silence.

Presently the guests began to drop in, one after another, and the embarrassing prelude was at an end.

The murmur of the soft, aristocratically modulated voices, the rustle of silken garments, and the odor of rich perfumes filled the air. People talked of the last ball and the coming *soirée;* the gentlemen discussed the latest development in politics, and the ladies commented on the new opera and its singers—a trifling, froth-like bubble of conversation. And Reginald, even while he seemed to listen courteously to Mrs. Longsdale's commonplace dissertations on the superior ad-

vantages of a republican form of government, was thinking within himself, not without bitterness, that they were like children walking over the flower-draped carpet which is stretched over a precipice. Could they but read the inner life of host and hostess, who were receiving them so smilingly; could they penetrate into the secret of the heart—well, this was a world of hollow smiles and false show, Reginald Delamere told himself. What right had he to look for an exemption from the general rule?

At length the conversation drifted to a divorce in fashionable circles, which was then the topic of small-talk everywhere.

"It's dreadful, isn't it?" said Mrs. Longsdale, lifting her flaxen eyebrows. "But then, you see, she never cared for him; it was only his money she married him for."

"A regular *mariage de convenance*," added her husband.

"Such things happen very frequently now," said Lady Helen Dalton, carelessly. "Thank you, Monsieur de Ramirou, just half that banana—not any more wine, please. But did you hear, Mrs. Longsdale, that Colonel St. Argyle's name was mixed up in the affair?"

Ida glanced up suddenly, as she was toying with her silver nut-cracker, and met the piercing gaze of her husband. In an instant her eyes were averted, and strive as she would to repress the rebellious blood, it mounted to her cheek in crimson billows. Why did she blush? Not because the name of Colonel St. Argyle signified a particle to her, one way or the other: but simply because she felt her husband to be watching her with jealous suspicion, and because it was highly desirable that she should *not* blush. She could have torn her hair in anger and mortification at herself.

"Colonel St. Argyle!" echoed Mrs. Longsdale, sagaciously. "I dare say he's just the sort of man that a silly, infatuated creature like Marie du Plessis would fall in love with; but I don't think he ever cared for her—"

"Oh," said Lady Helen, satirically, "he's a regular lady-killer, who seems to have no other occupation than that of flirting with every pretty woman in Paris!"

"He ought to have his head broken," said Mr. Longsdale, vindictively. "The sanctity of married life should be respected more than it is in this unaccountable city of Paris. I'm sure I don't know what has become of all the happy marriages. There are no such things nowadays!"

"Here is one," said Lady Helen, placing her hand caressingly on Mrs. Delamere's shoulder. "It isn't necessary to go very far for a refutation to your theory, Mr. Longsdale. I

think our host and hostess of to-day will afford a pretty fair illustration that there are such things as happy marriages still extant!"

Ida never lifted her eyes from the painted wreath of violets upon her plate; and Reginald said, speaking slowly:

"Yes, Lady Helen, you are quite right. My wife and I are, at this moment, perhaps, the happiest couple in Paris!"

Oh, the bitter satire of his tone! the cadence of contemptuous scorn! To think that those gay triflers should accept it all as Gospel truth, and never suspect the hidden under-current of irony!

As his voice died away, Ida looked up into his face with a wild, desperate appeal in her large, liquid eyes—a mute entreaty that he would abstain from this sneering comment, which was so much harder to endure than silence; but there was no mercy in his expression.

"If I only dared tell him!" she thought; "but no, I must endure it all in silence!"

When at length the party broke up and Reginald Delamere and his wife were left *tête-à-tête*, neither of them alluded to the episode of the evening that was still so fresh in both of their memories. Reginald was thinking bitterly of the confirmation he had heard of his own private opinion concerning Colonel St. Argyle; and Ida, as she sat before the fire, dreamily gazing into its red, dying embers, was repeating to herself:

"He might have mercy upon me! he might have a little compassion!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE BREACH WIDENS.

"IDA, my sweetest—what! weeping all by yourself? Tell me, *mia carissima*, what grieves you?"

Mme. Avioli sat down beside Ida Delamere, and gently lifting the fair, disheveled head from its hiding-place among the satin sofa-pillows drew it to her bosom, heedless of the embroidered carriage-shawl of white China crape that she wore.

Ida threw both arms round the countess's neck and wept freely upon her shoulder.

"Ah, Madame Avioli—Lucille—I am so miserable!"

"Miserable? You, my sunbeam—the very incarnation of youth and happiness!"

"Happiness!" echoed Ida, bitterly. "I do not know what it means. I tell you I am most miserable!"

"Ah," said Mme. Avioli, smoothing the tangled silky curls

which were so disordered, "you have then found out, Ida *mia*, that there is a dark and cruel wave that flows through life's brightest current—age and the most skillful voyagers can not avoid it!"

"Did I not tell you long ago, Lucille, that I had discovered life was not all roses?" asked Ida, mournfully.

"Tell me about it, sweet one," murmured the countess, caressingly.

Ida lifted her head and looked at Mme. Avioli with wistful, heavy eyes.

"I can not! Oh, Lucille, this is the hardest of it all. It is a sorrow I can not, must not breathe to a living soul!"

"Pardon me, Ida, I would not intrude myself on your confidence, yet is it not something to know that one heart sympathizes truly with you whatever may be your grief?"

"Oh, Lucille, it is everything!" sobbed Ida. "*You* love me. *You* believe in me, whoever else deserts me. I should die without you, dear, dearest Lucille."

"Not so bad as that, my little vehement tropic bird," smiled Mme. Avioli, soothingly. "You have your husband."

"My husband!" Ida's lips involuntarily compressed, and the words she had nearly uttered remained unspoken.

No; cold and cruel as he had been, he was her husband still, and she was in duty bound to cover his faults with the veil of wife-like silence. Not even to the dove-eyed friend of her bitterest solitude would she breathe a word of complaint.

And Mme. Avioli's next sentence seemed almost a reflection of her own hurriedly shaped thoughts.

"And, Ida, remember that I am older than you, and don't for a moment think I mean to be impertinent or dictatorial; but you must never allow yourself to forget that your husband stands to you, God excepted, in the first and nearest place in all the world. Do not let any trifling misunderstanding, any word forgotten, perchance, as soon as it in uttered, come between your soul and his. Oh, Ida, I have known so many shipwrecked lives that, but for this one sunken rock—lack of confidence between husband and wife—might have been happy to their end."

Ida listened in silence to Mme. Avioli's sweet, sad voice. She recognized the truth of what she said; yet she could but tell herself, in very truth, Reginald was more to blame than she was—that she was but the helpless victim of a chain of cruel circumstances. Neither could she have explained to her friend, inasmuch as she scarcely yet fully comprehended it herself, that the child-like, spontaneous affection — it was

hardly love—which had at first brightened her romantic union with her boy-husband was beginning to fade away, leaving in its stead a growing indifference. Love must be fostered and cherished by sunshine and tenderness; it can not long withstand what seems to be deliberate thwartings and cold aversions. Reginald and Ida could not read the secrets of each other's heart; and so the breach widened between them day by day and hour by hour.

Mme. Avioli felt this, yet she was powerless to help the young people. She had said all she could, both to Ida and her husband, and she recognized too deeply the truth that there is a period in all married lives when no external hand can avail to aid, when the battle of fate must be waged alone, to venture on any further interference.

"Ida," she said, "see how lovely the sunshine is. Shall we go out for a drive? Come; half an hour in the fresh air will do you a world of good, and restore the carnation to those white cheeks of yours."

"But my eyes?"

"Bathe them, and brush out your tangled hair, and throw on a shawl, and you will be ready. Don't refuse me. I have set my heart on your companionship for a little while."

And Ida, after many excuses and remonstrances, yielded to the countess's solicitations.

Mme. Avioli's carriage, a low, open barouche or drag, lined with blue satin, and painted a deep Mazarine blue, was at the door, drawn by a pair of magnificent black steeds, which the countess delighted in driving herself, with the groom sitting up behind with folded arms, and a countenance which betokened mild resignation to his mistress's freaks, whatever shape they might take.

The cool, invigorating air and the rapid motion, together with Mme. Avioli's lively chat, soon brought back a flush to Ida's cheeks and a momentary sparkle of animation to her eyes, and she was looking quite like herself again, when a voice sounded in her ear, making her start in spite of herself.

"How fortunate I am in meeting you! and where are you going?"

It was Colonel St. Argyle, who had ridden up to the side of their low carriage, with difficulty restraining the speed of his handsome horse, whose bit and mane were flecked with foam, while his impatient caracolings and arching neck presented a striking spectacle of equine beauty.

"Anywhere—nowhere!" said Mme. Avioli. "The fact is, Colonel St. Argyle, we don't know ourselves."

"Then I am going nowhere and anywhere," said Colonel St. Argyle, laughing.

"But suppose we don't care for an escort?"

"You would not be so cruel as to send me away!" pleaded the colonel, looking very handsome, and very much in despair, as he still rode along by the side of the carriage.

"You must make yourself very amusing, then," said Mme. Avioli; "for you haven't an idea what a delicious little chat we were having."

"I shall be inspired by the society I am in," exclaimed the colonel, gallantly.

But Ida, beyond a few murmured words of necessary greeting, had neither spoken nor looked up. She was sorry they had chanced to encounter St. Argyle, whom she was beginning to dislike. She would have much preferred a continuance of her *tête-à-tête* with the countess, and, moreover, she was unwilling that Reginald should have even the shadow of an excuse for his unreasonable jealousy.

"Have I brought the spirit of silence upon Mrs. Delamere?" gayly demanded Colonel St. Argyle, after one or two unavailing attempts to draw her into the conversation.

"How is it, Ida?" laughingly asked the countess. "It must be you, colonel, for she was talkative enough before we met you."

Ida looked up with a sudden sparkle in her eyes to disclaim the charge, for she would not have Colonel St. Argyle suppose that the accident of his companionship affected her either one way or the other—when, suddenly the tramp of several horses' feet dashed past them over the smooth causeway, and Ida felt, like a baneful gleam of withering lightning, the flash of her husband's eyes upon her—stern, reproachful, bitterly scornful.

"Mr. Delamere!" cried Mme. Avioli, "the foremost of all that dashing equestrian party! But why does he not stop and speak to us?"

"Again," thought Ida, her hands involuntarily tightening over each other, as they lay in her lap. "Of what use is it for me to strive against Fate? I may as well abandon myself to the overmastering current at once."

Meanwhile, Reginald Delamere, slackening the speed of his horse, when they were some little distance beyond, allowed his companions, Mr. Longsdale and Sir John Dalton, to overtake him.

"Was that St. Argyle talking to your wife and the Countess Avioli?" demanded Sir John, considerably out of breath with his gallop. "I thought I recognized that white horse of

his; but faith, we swept by so like a whirlwind, that I had much ado to keep my seat."

"Yes, it was," said Mr. Longsdale. "Queer story, isn't it, about St. Argyle and that poor chap, Du Plessis?"

"I haven't heard it. Any new development?" eagerly asked Sir John, on the *qui vive* for fashionable scandal.

"Why, it seems that Argyle has a pretty little way of gambling, and he hasn't any particular income of his own to spend. Madame Du Plessis has been in the habit of asking her husband for fabulous sums of money, giving this, that, and the other excuse for her extravagant requirements. Poor Du Plessis never discovered it until the other day, when it leaked out, in some of the evidence in court, that his money was all gone to pay St. Argyle's gambling debts."

"The scoundrel!" ejaculated Sir John. "I have no patience with the laws of society which allow a villain like St. Argyle to go unpunished, and visit all their vengeance upon the weak, helpless women."

Longsdale shrugged his shoulders.

"If there were no women like Maria Du Plessis," he said, "there would be no men like St. Argyle. Moreover, they say Du Plessis isn't the only husband in Paris who has ignorantly paid for the support of this fashionable villain."

Reginald Delamere listened to these disclosures in silence, mentally resolving that if he had any shadow of authority left, Ida should break off all association with this man.

When, at length, Colonel St. Argyle had left them, and Mme. Avioli had turned her horses' heads homeward, she said to Ida:

"*Cara*, I don't like that man."

"I thought you were great friends?"

"By no means—merely friendly acquaintances. I did like him very well at first; there was a freshness and originality about the man that were very winning; but instead of the frank, generous nature one expects to underlie such an external as that, he seems to me cold, crafty, and cunning. Moreover, I don't like the manner in which he appears in this Du Plessis divorce case. I think hereafter I shall be coldly civil to him; nothing more. And you, Ida, are much too childlike and beautiful ever to allow your name to be mentioned as that of a special friend of his."

"I do not particularly fancy him," said Ida, briefly.

"And it may be only a fancy, dearest; but I have sometimes imagined your husband was not exactly pleased with your receiving the attentions of this fascinating Lothario.

Don't imagine me a meddling old gossip, Ida. I only speak from the overprecaution of a loving heart."

As she spoke she tried to get a glance into her companion's eyes, but Ida held her head resolutely downward, so that the drooping black lace folds of her veil hid her profile, and Mme. Avioli was forced to be content with the tones of her voice, as she replied:

"I shall certainly discourage any more visits from him in the future."

"But," she added to herself, "of what avail will it be? The harm is all done."

As she slowly ascended the broad, carpeted staircase that led to her apartments, Mathilde met her.

"That man has been here, madame."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Ida, pushing back the jetty curls from her forehead. "He was not to return for a fortnight at least."

"He has been here, madame, nevertheless," persisted Mathilde, "and waited nearly an hour for you."

Ida sat down with a gesture of despairing weariness.

"How long has he been gone, Mathilde?"

"About fifteen minutes, madame. He seemed very much annoyed at not being able to see you, and left this note."

"I am glad Reginald was out, at all events," thought Ida, as, without removing her hat and gloves, she unfolded the slip of paper on which were written these words:

"CARA SIGNORINA" ("The insolence of the man!" thought Ida, indignantly),—"I find myself in a position from which only an immediate supply of money can extricate me. I know that I promised not to annoy you again at present; but what is a poor man to do when fate and destiny pit themselves against him? A thousand pounds of good English money are what I want and what I *must* have. It seems much, but, after all, what is it compared with the value of what I hide within my faithful, my unrevealing bosom? With this trifling sum, which you, signorina, can easily raise, I shall be able to keep myself from pestering you with entreaties and complaints, for at least one year, and perhaps longer. Surely you can not hesitate, signorina. But in case you do not see fit to extend a generous helping hand to one who has ever been the sport of an unpropitious fortune, I must try the alternative of an appeal to the signor, your husband, whom I have never yet had the pleasure of seeing. To-morrow, at an

early hour, I will call to receive your answer, and, as I trust, your beautiful consideration for my discretion.

"Yours, humbly and hopefully, G. A."

The paper dropped into Ida's lap? A thousand pounds! How was she to raise the money? For, that it must be ready, she knew Giuseppe too well to doubt, unless she chose to have the fatal secret blazoned abroad to the greedy curiosity of the world. She had jewelry, to be sure, but she had parted with all the lesser articles, and what remained—her diamonds, corals, and cameos, as well as sundry other costly trinkets—would be at once missed and inquired after, in case she ventured to try and dispose of them. Giuseppe had kept her liberal supply of pin-money drained for the last few weeks, and she was almost, if not absolutely, penniless. No; the more she considered it in her own mind, the more convinced she was that the only way to obtain the required sum was through a direct appeal to her husband's liberality.

"Reginald is always generous," she thought, with a pang of remorse at the consciousness that she was the unwilling cause of this confidence and generosity being abused. "He will give it me; but oh! if he should question me as to what it is for! No, I dare not ask so much at once. I will pawn my diamonds for half the money—Mathilde knows how it can be done—and then, in a very short space of time, I can redeem them again."

She started up, retying her bonnet strings.

"Mathilde," she said, hurriedly, "get on your things and come with me. I want you to show me the place where they advance money on jewels—the place, you know, that is like a private house."

"But, madame, not in this dress! All Paris would know before to-morrow morning that Madame Delamere had pawned her jewels!"

Ida looked down on her blue silk dress, with its overskirt of blue velvet, and the shawl of India cashmere which accompanied it, and felt bitterly what a child she was in all the essentials of worldly wisdom.

"What shall I do, Mathilde?"

"Madame must wear a plain black dress—the gravest she has—and I will lend her an *aquæ scutum*, and my black worsted hood, with its veil."

And Mathilde, who was intensely fond of tableaus, private theatricals, and all the incidentals of semi-dramatic life, at-

tired her young mistress with infinite satisfaction for their stolen expedition.

Ida's sensations are hardly to be described as she went downstairs side by side with Mathilde, shrinking beneath the astonished stare of old Anastase, the *concierge.*

"It is my cousin, Anastase—my cousin, only," glibly lied the French maid as the old woman rose up in her lurking-place to unlock the door.

"And when, then, did she come in, your cousin?" demanded Anastase, as if the riddle were still unsolved in her mind.

Mathilde laughed.

"Be easy, good Anastase. It is not I who will tell madame of the little naps, so refreshing, which you take when the key is in the door. I shall be old myself some day, and infirm."

"It is false!" grumbled Anastase; but she let them pass without any further comment, and Ida breathed freer when they were fairly in the street.

"Is this a pawnbroker's shop?" she whispered to Mathilde, when at length they sat in what looked like an elegant private parlor, with an open piano, and plants and birds in the sunshiny windows.

"Hush, madame!"

Mathilde motioned toward the door, through which was entering a bald-headed old gentleman, in a suit of glossy, irreproachable black. With this personage, by dint of Mathilde's assistance, their business was speedily transacted. The diamonds were pledged for a sum amounting to five hundred pounds in English money, and Ida, carefully concealing in her bosom the little crimson paper ticket, which was her only surety for the glittering stones so admired during the winter in Paris, left the handsome private house, whose proprietor so obligingly "lent money on temporary security."

To Ida's infinite relief, Reginald did not come in until she was dressed for dinner.

"You are late to-night," she said.

"A few minutes late," was his cold reply; "but as I am ready in time, it does not signify."

"The carriage is at the door," announced Achille, for Mr. and Mrs. Delamere were going out to dinner that evening, at Mme. Avioli's, to meet a select party of friends.

"Are you ready, Ida?" he asked.

"Yes, quite ready," she answered, "but—Reginald—" She stopped, half-way to the door, with a surprised expression.

"I wanted to ask you something before we went out," began Ida, hurriedly.

"What is it?"

"I—I have not as much money as I require at present," began Ida, twisting and turning the gold links of fringe that hung from her bracelets. "I should like it, if you will give me some to-night."

"How much do you wish?" asked Reginald, pleased at Ida's asking for a favor at his hands, and expecting to hear a trifling sum named, as he knew that she had all along been liberally supplied with money.

"Five hundred pounds," was the answer, spoken in a low tone, with her eyes still cast down, for our poor little Ida was not an accomplished dissembler.

"Five hundred pounds!" echoed Reginald, in surprise and displeasure. "Do you want to buy a pair of carriage horses, or a villa beyond the Paris lines?"

Ida, more embarrassed than ever, murmured something in a scarcely audible tone of voice about "necessary expenses."

Reginald's suspicions, roused by this constraint of manner into an unwonted activity, took a giant stride into the dark regions of possibility; his brow grew dark, and the veins started out like knotted cords around his temples. In an instant the words Sir John Dalton had spoken that morning came back into his mind as vividly as if written thereon in characters of flame. This, then, was the meaning of Ida's very unusual appeal. She could not speak kindly to him for his own sake, when she saw him pining at her side an unloved husband; but she could bring down her pride when Colonel St. Argyle's unpaid debts were in question.

Reginald Delamere's mental arguments were not logical—people under the influence of strong passion seldom are logical. In the seething maelstrom of his mind, possibilities became probabilities, and probabilities assumed the shape of what actually is. Ida was arraigned, tried, and condemned, at the bar of her husband's heart, during the half minute in which he stood looking down at her with a sterner face than she had ever beheld.

But, he resolved within himself, he would be calm—he would not judge rashly, however overwhelming the evidence might be; and with a mighty effort he restrained the torrent of reproachful words which rose to his lips, and asked, as collectedly as possible:

"What do you want this money for?"

There was a moment's silence; he repeated the question in a colder, more metallic voice than ever.

"I can not tell you, Reginald!"

Had he been less excited, he might perhaps have read in the anguish and humiliation of her voice an appeal to the noble feeling of his nature, but he was past all such delicate discrimination now.

"You can not tell me," he repeated in a voice that was like muffled thunder. "Then I can tell you one thing, madame—no money of mine shall ever go to pay the debts of that miserable scoundrel—"

He stopped abruptly. Ida was looking at him with such an expression of pale horror as convinced him of the accuracy of his suspicions. Yet, infuriated as he was, he dared not say more with that innocent rosebud of a face turned toward his own, and checked himself, the last words still unspoken:

"No," he said, abruptly. "I will not give you five hundred pounds, Mrs. Delamere, although I am sorry to cause you any inconvenience in your financial arrangements."

Ida shrunk away from his tone. Actual anger she might have combated with, but this sneering Mephistophelean mood seemed to blight her as the desert simoon blights all that is fair and tender in its path.

"What shall I do?" she cried, half aloud, clasping her jeweled hands. "Oh, what shall I do?"

"You should have asked yourself that question long ago, madame," was the cold reply, as the husband drew on and buttoned his lavender kid gloves. "I certainly shall not help you out of the dilemma. Allow me to hand you down to the carriage."

"I can not go out to-night, Reginald," said Ida, pressing her hand to her forehead. "I think I am going to have a headache."

"What convenient things headaches are!" sneered her husband. "Perhaps it was brought on by your carriage ride with Colonel St. Argyle for an escort."

He rang the bell violently.

Mathilde, who was just about to sit down to a cozy little game of cards in Anastase's room, below stairs, answered the summons.

"Your mistress is ill, attend to her!" was his stern behest, and the wondering Mathilde removed her young lady's glittering raiment, unclasped her jewels, disengaged her flower-wreath from her hair, and deluged her with colognes and

scented waters before she would leave her to the blessed balsam of silence and solitude.

"I will try to go to sleep now, if you will leave me, Mathilde," she said.

And she did sleep, after awhile, in spite of the fears and suspicions which harassed her mind, the heavy, cheerless sleep which exhausts without refreshing. Nor did she know what might perhaps have altered the fast-turning current of her life, that Reginald, as the evening wore on, came to her bedside, and bending over her, pressed a kiss full of grief, and passion, and wounded love, upon her lovely lips.

"She can sleep," he thought, "while I keep a lonely vigil. Oh, my wife, my false wife, whom I love so tenderly, although her heart has gone from me forever!"

CHAPTER XX.

REGINALD SEEKS FOR HELP.

MME. LA COMTESSE AVIOLI was sitting at her late breakfast the next morning when a card was brought up to her.

"Mr. Delamere," she read, in some surprise. "Show him up at once."

Mme. Avioli's morning-room was bright and cheerful, with a deep bay-window full of hyacinths in full blossom, looking toward the south. The carpet was of a drab color with crimson arabesques woven through it in a Persian pattern, and the furniture of brown and crimson satin was not so gay as to distract the attention of the visitor from the bric-a-brac cabinet, the rare little statuettes, and the gem-like paintings which decorated the sober brown walls. Books, newspapers, and magazines lay on the breakfast-table, and a bright fire of Liverpool coal blazed in the grate, for Mme. Avioli could not endure the foreign fashion of scanty wood-fires.

She herself looked fairer, younger, and more like a pearl than ever in her blue cashmere *robe du matin* with a border of golden wheat embroidered just above the hem, and gold tassels depending from the taper waist. A tiny coiffure of Mechlin lace threaded with blue ribbon was pinned with a jeweled arrow among the luxuriant braids and tresses of her lustrous auburn hair (the graceful tribute which Parisian ladies pay to middle age) and the bloom upon her cheeks was even fresher and more delicate than when she stood in the midst of crowded evening assemblies or in the heated atmosphere of the ball-room.

She looked up with astonishment at Reginald Delamere's haggard countenance as he entered her presence.

"What has procured me the pleasure of this visit, Mr. Delamere?" she asked, playfully, as she motioned him toward a chair. But his grave face did not relax in the slightest degree.

"You will excuse me, Madame Avioli, if I seem blunt and precipitate," he said, "when you learn the object of my visit. It is about Ida."

"About Ida? She is well, I hope?"

"Yes, she is well, I suppose—but—she is miserable, and so am I."

Mme. Avioli's expressive face betokened her sincere sympathy and concern.

"I have long seen that all is not right between you, Mr. Delamere," she said, earnestly, "but I have not ventured to speak to Ida on a subject so delicate. If you, however, will be more frank with me, and if my advice can avail aught, I need not say how entirely I shall sympathize with you."

"I will be frank, Madame Avioli," said Reginald, and he kept his word, beginning at the beginning, and telling her the whole story of the estrangement growing out of doubts and uncertainties, and ending in actual alienation, which had risen up between them during the past few weeks.

"I appeal to you, Madame Avioli," he continued, "as Ida's dearest friend, for advice and counsel both for her and myself!"

"Forgive me, Mr. Delamere," said the countess, gently, "if I say that it seems to me you are both to blame in some degree. Ida has been careless and unthinking; you have, perhaps, failed to make sufficient allowance for her youth and inexperience. As for this fancy of yours, that she cares for Colonel St. Argyle, I believe it to be utterly unfounded."

"I wish I could agree with you," said Reginald, bitterly.

"You would, if you were not a prejudiced witness."

"Then, how do you account for her asking for this sum of money, the destined use of which she is determined to keep a secret from me?"

"I can not account for it at all as yet," said Mme. Avioli, with slow thoughtfulness, "but I am quite certain that Ida will eventually be able to explain it to your entire satisfaction."

"But why not now?"

"There may be a great many reasons. She may be tempted to indulge in some extravagance which she hardly likes to confide to you."

"I have not been so niggardly with her as to give cause for any such timidity," said Delamere, bitterly.

"Oh," pursued Mme. Avioli, "there may be other reasons. You must be gentle with her, Mr. Delamere, and very tolerant—remember what a child she still is!"

"I forget nothing, Madame Avioli," he exclaimed, passionately, "except the one grand, overmastering fear of my life, that I forced her—yes, forced is the word," he added, bitterly—"into a marriage that has since grown hateful in her eyes. I loved her dearly—in spite of everything, I love her still—but every day that rises and sets over my head brings more deeply to me the conviction that she has ceased to care for me. In fact, I sometimes doubt whether she ever loved me."

"Then why did she marry you? In your country these things are not, as with us, the result of calculation and policy."

"Because she was too young, too much of a child, fully to realize what she was doing. I should have given her more time to reflect; it was all my fault."

Mme. Avioli made no answer; she was thinking.

"And I?" she said, after a short interval of silence. "What is it that you wish me to do, Mr. Delamere?"

"Your influence with Ida is very great, Madame Avioli, and if you could talk with her as you women know how to talk—if you could in any way ascertain the mystery of her changed behavior, or learn whether her heart is really estranged from me beyond the possibility of recall—"

"Be easy, my friend," said Mme. Avioli, with the soft shadow of pitying tenderness in her eyes. "I will do my best for you, and for her as well. I will see Ida this very day, and before the sun is down I hope to convince you how idle and foundationless are all your fears and conjectures."

Reginald wrung the soft, friendly hand she extended to him.

"If you can do that, Madame Avioli, I shall value your friendship as the most priceless gift of my life-time. And when will you come to our hotel?"

"I don't know; I can't exactly tell yet; but it will be some time in the course of the day. Ida is well, you tell me?"

"No—not exactly well. She looked pale as a ghost when I left her this morning."

"Poor child," said Mme. Avioli, tenderly. "Well, it will not be long before I shall see her."

After Mr. Delamere had taken his leave, Mme. Avioli sat for some time musing over the recital he had given her.

"It is the old, old story," she said to herself, with a smile.

"Love, which deems that the roses of spring-time never shall fade; youth, which is impatient of the least ripple in the serene tide of its perfect bliss. But with two hearts as true and noble as his and hers, the shadow can be but temporary." Rising, she rang the bell. It was answered by her maid, a middle-aged, substantial-looking woman, very different from the butterfly-like Mathilde. "Ellen," she said, "order the carriage at once, and attend me in my room. I am going out."

"So early, madame?"

"Yes, so early."

And the clock was striking twelve as Mme. Avioli's carriage rolled away from her door. For her heart was in her task, and she felt that she could not rest until it was completed.

As the light little equipage whirled through the streets, Mme. Avioli chanced to look up at a street corner, where a little crowd had collected round the caricatures in a shop-window, and in the midst of the pretty concourse, one face looked out at her—the face of a middle-aged man, with his hands in his pockets, who was leaning idly against a lamp-post, his lips compressed as in the act of whistling.

Their eyes met—those of the high-bred lady in her satin-lined barouche, and the lounging pariah of the streets—and he lifted his hat from his brows and bowed low, with mock courtesy.

She sat, silent and pale, as if she had suddenly been transformed to stone, and noticed his recognition neither by word nor look.

"Drive faster," she said to the coachman, in a voice so husky and unnatural that the man turned round to look at her in surprise. "You are creeping like a snail through the streets. Drive faster, I say!"

And then, as the servant quickened the speed of his horses, she called out once more:

"Home, Sebastian."

"I thought, madame—"

"No matter what you thought. Home, I say!"

And, as the horses' heads were turned, and they were speeding along through the sunlit beauty of the streets, Mme. Avioli sunk back among the cushions, pale and breathless.

"I can go nowhere *now*," she murmured, unconscious that the words had passed her lips.

Meantime the man at the street corner had looked keenly after the carriage-wheels.

"A fine turnout," he said to a fellow-lounger. "Now, I wonder whose it may be?"

"The dark-blue one with the black horses? Humph!" ejaculated the other, in all the pride of superior knowledge, "that is the carriage of Madame la Comtesse Avioli."

"Madame la Comtesse Avioli," repeated the man, slowly. "Ma—dame la Comtesse Avioli! A pretty name—and a pretty carriage. Well, well, it's a fine thing to be rich."

CHAPTER XXI.

"WHO IS MY MOTHER?"

IDA DELAMERE had experienced an involuntary sensation of relief when she saw her husband go out directly their silent and unsocial breakfast was concluded; for she knew that Giuseppe's hateful presence might be forced upon her at almost any hour, and she felt that she had neither strength nor spirit for the plots and counterplots necessary to conceal his visits from the husband, whose suspicions were already awakened in no common degree.

But the morning hours went by, and still Giuseppe did not come.

"I can not wage this unequal war with circumstances any longer," she thought, wearily, as she sat in her boudoir, at about two o'clock, waiting for Mathilde to announce the presence of the wily Italian. "Reginald has ceased to care for me! nor do I wonder at it. I am sick and weary of myself and this ever-widening net-work of lies and subterfuges. I can even see that my beauty is beginning to fade—the beauty which won his heart so brief awhile ago. Yes, it would have been better if we had never met, and sometimes I am wicked enough to feel that it might be better if we should never meet again. These Parisian laws of divorce—they have their advantages after all. But what am I thinking about?" and Ida checked herself with a shudder as Mathilde, the French maid, noiselessly opened the door.

"Giuseppe Antonardi is here, madame!"

"Very well, Mathilde. Remain in the ante-chamber and see that no one enters to disturb us."

Mathilde withdrew, and the next instant Giuseppe entered the room.

"I hope I behold madame this morning in the enjoyment of health," was his smooth greeting; but Ida paid no attention to it.

"Giusepe," she said, speaking in the even, monotonous way of one who recites a well-conned lesson. "I have but

five hundred pounds for you this morning. I tried my best to get the whole sum you named, but I could not—it was impossible!"

"Monsieur, your husband, perhaps—"

"I asked him for it, Giuseppe, and he refused it!"

It was with a feeling of unutterable humiliation that she spoke those words. Had she then fallen so low that she must confess to this foreign adventurer how little influence she had left with her husband?

Giuseppe contracted his forehead until the black brows seemed to meet over his eyes.

"I asked you for a thousand pounds."

"I know it, and I have told you why I have but five hundred. Take it, Giuseppe, and be gone, or do your worst!"

The tone of despairing apathy warned the villain that he could go no further in his extortions with safety.

"*Bene!*" he ejaculated, stroking his chin, "if madame really could do no better for one who is faithful to the interest of her family," and he took the folded bills she had laid upon the malachite stand.

"Of my family!" she repeated, bitterly.

"Yes, madame—of the race of L'Echelle. Would I keep this secret, think you, if it concerned any but your mother? I may be a poor man, madame—despised by many, yourself among the number—but I have, notwithstanding, a conscience, and the L'Echelles were my masters long before you were born."

"Do any of them still live?" asked Ida, listlessly.

"Alas! no—except we talk of your mother."

"Giuseppe," said Ida, turning her heavy eyes, surrounded by dark rings, which denoted the mental distress she had gone through during the last few days, toward him, and speaking with sudden imperative emphasis, "who is my mother? I will know!"

Giuseppe smiled.

"Well, madame, there is no reason why you should not know now. Yesterday I could not have told you who she was; now I can tell you who she is. It's a pretty name, a high-bred name—a name, they tell me, that stands high in the lists of fashion in this gay city of Paris. Ah, I see you are impatient—and perhaps with reason. Your mother, lady"—and he lowered his voice as Ida bent forward, with pallid cheeks and eyes of wild, sickening fear rather than expectation—"is Madame la Comtesse Avioli."

Ida uttered a low, stifled cry.

"Madame Avioli! Impossible!"

"Not only possible, madame, but true," nonchalantly answered Giuseppe. "Ah, you may well look surprised, but the L'Echelles have gay hearts and bold ones. A murder more or less on their consciences signifies but little; and, my faith, the lady holds her head high! She has managed to evade me skillfully all these years, but I knew I should find her out at last."

"Madame Avioli is my mother!" slowly repeated Ida, as if the full significance of the words had not yet penetrated to her brain.

"Madame Avioli is your mother, and the murderess of Pierre L'Echelle," said Giuseppe.

"And I had learned to love her so!" broke from Ida's parched lips.

"Is it thus?" questioned the Italian, with foreign sentimentality. "Truly the instincts of nature are marvelous! You could never have dreamed that hers was the life whence your own sprung; and yet—"

Ida shuddered, and motioned him to desist.

"Does she know that—that—"

"That you are her child? No, madame; it is no part of my plan that she should have the rapture of folding a recovered daughter to her heart—a child whom she has long mourned as dead!"

"She will never do that, in any event," said Ida, with an involuntary tightening of her hands within each other.

Giuseppe observed her with a smile.

"Madame shares my sentiments," he said, cruelly exultant. "I knew from the first that there was no necessity for enjoining upon madame the slightest secrecy."

"Giuseppe," said Ida, angrily, "I despise myself more than I can tell for having one thought or sensation in common with you! but it is too much for my endurance to be taunted with it. Oh, if it had been any one but her. Leave me now, Giuseppe; you have remained here long enough—too long!"

"Madame is ill," said the Italian, looking inquiringly at her deathly pale face and drooping eyelids. "Shall I call madame's maid?"

"No, call no one, only leave me. I must be alone!"

"And when," craftily began Giuseppe, "shall I come for the rest of the little sum which madame's generosity—"

"I don't know—I don't care!" ejaculated Mrs. Delamere, in a voice which warned Giuseppe that his interests would be

best consulted by abandoning the point for the present. "I tell you to be gone!"

And Giuseppe departed, receiving no recognition whatever of his courteous words of farewell.

Left alone, Ida sunk down among the cushions of the low divan, burying her face in their silken depths, as if she would fain shut out light, life, and vision forever. A murderess's child! and that murderess Mme. Avioli, around whom the tendrils of her heart had already so fondly woven themselves. Ida could hardly comprehend the full meaning of this last stunning blow, which had so suddenly and cruelly descended upon her. She felt all the instincts of the wounded deer, which fain would shrink away from its kind and die, repelling alike aid or sympathy. She would have given worlds to be able to hide in some lonely wilderness, some desert island, where the taunts and mockings of the world could never reach her more. All her life long she had been, however, unconsciously an impostor. Would Mr. Gresham have admitted her into the peaceful precincts of his little family circle if he had known that her mother was a murderess? Would her husband have linked, with the time-honored patronymic of the aristocratic family of Delamere, the name of—a murderess's child? She looked shudderingly at her hands, as if she half expected to see upon the taper fingers the crimson of blood-stains. She felt as if the inherited mark of Cain must already be burning on her brow. Then, as if she could no longer remain still, she rose hurriedly to her feet, and began pacing restlessly up and down the floor, wringing her hands and moaning almost inaudibly as she went.

"I think," she muttered, "that people must have gone mad beneath the pressure of just such nameless horrors as mine. I should go mad if there were insanity dormant in our family; but there is not—there is only—murder! And, after all, what is murder but insanity? No, I will not think of these things—I must not! I must try and decide what will be the best for the future—the long, terrible, dreary future which, woe is me! I must live through. I am only sixteeen, and all the pulses of my life are vitally strong within me. Oh, if it were sixty-six!"

And so strangely interwoven are the awful and the trivial in our lives that Ida paused, even in this hour of her horror, and tried to fancy how she would look at sixty-six, capped, spectacled, and wrinkled, laughing hysterically at the grotesque idea.

"But it is such a long, long gulf of years that separates me from the friendly silence of the grave. Reginald must take

me away from Paris, beautiful Paris, where I have been so happy, so thoughtless, for I can never have a peaceful moment here again. And, besides, it is here that she lives—my mother! Oh!" thought Ida, with a new gush of bitterness into the cup of her anguished heart, "I have dreamed of her, my mother, so often; I have prayed, as a little child, to wake up some day and find my mother sitting at my bedside; and I have envied Angie and Eleanor the blessedness of a mother's love until my heart has been like fire within me. But oh! I never thought of finding a mother thus! Father in heaven! my rash prayer is granted—let Thy mercy avert its evil consequences!"

Then came a soft knocking at the door. She heeded it not. She had no ear, no sense for aught disconnected with this overwhelming anguish of her life. It was repeated somewhat more loudly, and she stopped abruptly in her restless wanderings up and down the room, throwing back her tangled curls with a movement of sharp impatience.

"What is wanting? Who is there?"

Mathilde's voice answered softly:

"It is I, madame;" and, opening the door gently, she announced, "Madame la Comtesse Avioli!"

CHAPTER XXII.

MADAME AVIOLI INTERCEDES.

MOTIONLESS and pale, Ida Delamere stood in the middle of the room, her silken draperies disheveled, her hair all entangled, and her small white hands clasped so tightly in each other that the blood seemed to settle, in small crimson dots, under each nail, as Mme. Avioli entered her boudoir, richly dressed, and lovely as a picture.

"Ida, my darling," ejaculated Mme. Avioli, in a voice of concern and grief, "you are ill—what can be the matter?"

"I am not ill," answered Ida, hoarsely, as she retreated from her visitor, still eying her as if she had been some apparition risen to confront her in ghastly horror.

"Then what ails you, Ida? Don't look at me so strangely!"

Mme. Avioli followed her, as she continued to shrink back, and would have taken her hand in hers, if Ida had not snatched it away with a low cry.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "There is blood on your hands!"

"Blood!" Mme. Avioli had grown as pale as Ida's self now, as she glanced down at her slender little pink-gloved

hands. "Child, what do you mean? There is no blood there!"

"I am not your child!" Ida ejaculated, passionately, her ear caught by the obnoxious words. "I will not be your child!"

"Ida, what can this mean?"

Mme. Avioli looked at Ida with such manifest horror and astonishment that it recalled her somewhat to her senses. The momentary madness passed away! She remembered the necessity for dissimulation in some degree, at least in the eyes of the world, the absolute need that that woman above all should not discover that she, her own unrecognized child, held the secret of her awful crime!

"I don't know," she gasped, sinking down in a low chair. "I think I am a little unwell. Don't touch me, please—I—I would rather be left to myself."

"But, Ida, your hand is hot, your face is flushed."

For although she had been so pale a moment or two ago, her cheeks were like scarlet now.

"What can I do for you?"

"A glass of water, please; Mathilde will bring it to me!"

A draught of iced, sparkling water seemed to revive Ida somewhat. She set down the goblet, and looked inquiringly at Mme. Avioli.

"May I inquire what induced you to favor me with the honor of a visit to-day?" she asked.

"I wanted to talk to you, Ida! I had much to say to you!"

"What was it?" demanded Ida, looking full at her visitor, with dilated eyes and a cheek that was again paling.

"Perhaps I had better not speak of it to-day," hesitated Mme. Avioli. "You are ill!"

"I am not ill," Ida mechanically replied. "I am as well as I ever shall be again. Say what you have to say, quickly."

Mme. Avioli hardly knew what to make of the hard, defiant mood, one so unlike Ida's usual loving, confiding self.

"Come and sit by me, then, *cara!*"

"Thank you," coldly responded Ida. "I am very comfortable here."

"Then I may draw my chair up to yours?"

"If you please."

But Mme. Avioli saw with surprise that Ida shuddered and recoiled as she laid her hand upon the cold little palm which lay in the young wife's lap.

"Ida, you are unhappy," she began softly.

"Yes, you have spoken truly. I am unhappy. So unhappy, that death would be a blessed relief from my misery!"

(Surely thus much she might speak to prevent her overburdened heart from breaking, she thought.)

"Your husband, too, is unhappy, Ida!"

"I suppose he is. I do not think it at all strange that he should be!" she answered, recklessly.

"But this is not as it should be, Ida," pleaded Mme. Avioli, wistfully.

"Is anything as it should be in this world?" was the reply, spoken almost fiercely.

"Ida, I am older than you. I have lived longer in the world than you, and my experience must be of some value!"

"Yes," quivered mockingly on Ida's lips, "your experience must have been strange and varied. You have led an eventful existence, Madame Avioli."

"I have, indeed, Ida—more eventful than you have any idea of!"

"How do you know how unlimited my ideas may be?"

Mme. Avioli looked puzzled.

"I don't understand you, Ida."

"That is not strange!"

"But," she went on, "I have seen with pain that gradual estrangement that has grown up between you and your husband. Why is it, Ida? What has fostered it?"

As Ida sat looking at Mme. Avioli with fevered cheeks and glittering eyes, she had it in her heart to cry out, reckless of consequences:

"It is your fault! You have been the cause of it! It has grown out of your humble enemies. The Scripture prophecy is fulfilled in spirit and in letter, and the sins of the parents have inevitably been visited upon their children!"

And then a cold thrill passed through her veins as she thought of the empty mockery of justice, the hollow falsehood of the law, where a woman who had broken through every restraint, and was amenable to the worst punishment mortal codes could inflict, was sitting there smiling and complacent, dressed in costly silks and lustrous velvets, without restraints either external or from her own conscience. Was she not a walking lie—a whited sepulcher?

As these things passed disjointedly through Ida's mind, Mme. Avioli was surprised at the expression of aversion in her eyes.

"Ida," she said, "you are so strange to-day I can not comprehend your moods."

"Was this all you were intending to say to me?"

"No, dearest; I had much else to tell you, but you have not yet answered my question about this unhappy feeling between yourself and your husband."

"Let him ask me himself if he wishes any further explanation upon the subject," Ida answered.

"He has asked you, Ida."

"How do you know?" demanded Ida.

"He told me so himself."

"He has taken you into his confidence, then?" asked the wife, with a curling lip.

"To a certain degree—yes."

"He shows great taste and discrimination in the selection of his confidantes."

"What do you mean, Ida?"

"Tell me, Madame Avioli," demanded Mrs. Delamere, with her eyes fixed unblenchingly on the soft, blue orbs of the countess, "if my husband were acquainted with all the previous history of your life, would he have been as ready as he is now to entreat your all-powerful intercession in his domestic troubles?"

"Certainly, why should he not?"

Mme. Avioli returned Ida's gaze without shrinking, and spoke in the calm, untroubled tones of candor and veracity. Truly, she was an adept in the art of hypocrisy.

"You speak of my previous life, Ida," resumed Mme. Avioli, as Ida made no response to her words. "Some day I should like to tell you about it; it has not been without some romance."

"I do not care to hear it."

"But, Ida," continued the countess, wounded more deeply than she cared to have appear visible, "you have asked me more than once to tell you the story of my life—now, when I volunteer it to you, you have no curiosity."

"Circumstances have changed since then," was the cold answer.

"Ida, have you withdrawn your heart from me entirely?"

"Yes, countess—entirely."

"And for what reason?"

"Am I bound to give an account of my thoughts and inclinations to you, Madame Avioli?"

"In justice—yes."

"Justice!" ejaculated Ida, scornfully. "What is justice but a sounding combination of syllables? You and I, Ma-

dame Avioli, have good cause to rejoice that it is nothing more!"

"Ida!" said Madame Avioli, growing more and more bewildered, "I insist upon knowing what you mean!"

"And you shall not know," said Ida, rising to her feet with the royal air of a queen dismissing her audience. "I repel your confidence, Madame Avioli, and I will not submit to any interference, at your hands, between my husband's and my own affairs. I regard it as officious as it is uncalled for, and, from you, coming with the worst grace in the world! And now, if you have no further communications to make," with a haughty inclination of the head, "I must beg to be left alone."

"Ida!"

"Have I not spoken with sufficient plainness?"

Mme. Avioli rose, pale, indignant, and deeply hurt.

"Ida," she said, "I can not understand all this, but after the words you have just uttered, it is impossible that I should remain longer. Adieu!"

She proffered her hand, but Ida never lifted her own to meet it.

"Adieu, Madame Avioli!"

"Forever, Ida?"

It was the last cry of the loving heart, loath to be separated from what had grown so dear to it.

"Yes, forever!"

The countess turned away, and went slowly out of the room, her head drooping, her eyes humid with the tears she would not allow to fall; she had been scorned, repulsed, insulted—yet, through it all she could not learn to hate the beautiful young creature who had grown so precious to her.

"It's some strange misunderstanding," she thought; "it will soon be cleared up, some day, and Ida will laugh at her own folly. But what can it be that has thus turned my dove into a savage eaglet—my lamb to a lioness? Is it possible—no, it can not be—that she is—jealous of me?"

Mme. Avioli stood an instant in the vestibule, pondering the new conjecture in her mind; but the next moment she dismissed it as utterly groundless and absurd. Reginald Delamere was not the kind of husband for a woman to feel jealous about, and even if he were, Mme. Avioli felt that she was the last one to rouse the resentful anger of a too-exacting wife!

On the stairway, just beyond the vestibule door, she met Mr. Delamere himself. His face lighted up as he recognized Mme. Avioli.

"You have seen her, then?" he cried, pausing and taking the countess's hand in his own.

"Yes, Mr. Delamere, I have seen her!"

"And what does she say?"

But to Reginald's infinite consternation, instead of answering, Mme. Avioli burst into tears.

"Countess! why, what is the matter?"

"She will not listen to me, Mr. Delamere," faltered Mme. Avioli; "she rejects my intercession, and drives me away from her with insults all the more cutting that they are quite incomprehensible to me."

Mr. Delamere was silent an instant, but his brows were contracted, and his eyes full of angry luster.

"But you will not abandon my cause, then, Madame Avioli?"

"What more can I do, Mr. Delamere?"

"She must receive you! she shall!" he ejaculated.

"Mr. Delamere, do not proceed rashly, or you may imperil the happiness of your whole future. Remember, she is young—she must be dealt gently with. Wait until this defiant mood has passed away."

"But, at all events," pleaded Reginald, "you will soon come again?"

"I can not, Mr. Delamere, until she herself sends for me. Remember, however, that you shall always have my prayers and best wishes."

And Mme. Avioli's eyes were full of tears as she pressed his hand, and parted from him.

Reginald went on through the anteroom into the pretty apartment where his young wife was still sitting, staring fixedly at the intertwining roses and violets, whose colors dyed the deep pile of the carpet.

She looked up as he entered, but spoke not a word of greeting.

"Ida," he said, the deep tones of his voice betokening a tumult of smothered anger, "what does this mean?"

"What, Reginald?"

"I have just met your former most intimate friend, Madame Avioli, on the stairs."

"She has gone, then?"

"Yes, she has gone, and you have driven her away."

"Have I?"

"She says you have insulted her—that she can never again cross your threshold until you yourself recall her."

"Then," interrupted Ida, "she will never cross it!"

"I insist upon it, Ida, that you write a note of apology to this lady," said Reginald.

"I will not," Ida replied, firmly.

"Ida, what has she done?" he demanded.

"What has she done?" A shudder convulsed the wife's slender form, but she was silent.

"You know very well that you ought to be honored by her notice—flattered by her genuine interest in your affairs," went on Reginald, vehemently.

"I feel highly gratified by your high estimate of me!" rejoined Ida, coldly.

"How has she offended you?"

"She has not offended me, but I choose to break off our friendship."

"And I choose that you shall not. Ida, are you mad?"

"Not yet, Reginald; but I do not know how soon I may be if this sort of thing goes on much longer!"

Her voice, more piteous far than tears, appealed to him with strange electric power. He had vowed at the holy altar to love and cherish her, yet here she was, pale, wretched, and, as it were, seeming to isolate herself from the consoling influence of aught in the shape of human sympathy.

Inexpressibly softened, he sat down beside her, and would have drawn her to his side.

"Ida! my poor little darling!" he said, in broken accents, "my wounded dove, come back to my heart, and let us forget all these jarring discords!"

But she shuddered, and shrunk away from the gentle touch of his hand, as if it were painful to her.

"Don't, Rex, don't!" she murmured, faintly. "You would not, if you knew—"

"If I knew how entirely your sentiments and feelings toward me had changed, Ida," he assented, drawing back, with an icy coldness succeeding to the softer mood that had for a moment come over his nature. "Perhaps you are right. I thank you for reminding me of it."

And without another word he left the room, leaving Ida to the gnawing agony of her own sad thoughts.

He had misconstrued her again. He was hurt—wounded—and justly so. Well, what of it? Life was a series of mistakes, it seemed, and strive as she would, it seemed to be her destiny to be misunderstood and shrunk from. Was there any use in endeavoring to disentangle this dark and mystic web whose meshes were tightening round her on every side? She sat there quite silent and motionless, her head lying

against the side of the sofa, and her hands folded wearily, until Mathilde came into the room to remind her that it was time to dress for an evening reception in one of the most fashionable faubourgs of Paris.

"Yes, Mathilde," she answered, rising languidly, "I suppose the world must roll on, though we are crushed beneath its chariot wheels."

"Madame?" said Mathilde, with wide-open eyes.

"Nothing. I am ready to dress."

Mathilde surveyed her mistress's colorless cheeks with an expression of discontent and a doubtful shake of the head.

"Madame will allow me to put the little *soupçon* of rouge on her cheeks to-night?" she coaxed, as Mrs. Delamere entered her dressing-room, where clusters of wax-candles burned brightly on either side of the Psyche glass that filled the space between the two windows. "Madame is so pale!"

"No," said Ida, stamping her foot with sudden decision. "I am false enough already; I will not add to the deception by an acted lie!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

IDA'S PROPOSITION.

APPARENTLY Mrs. Delamere had never been in better health or spirits than she was at the reception that night. Mathilde would have thought there was no need for rouge, if she could have seen her young mistress's brilliant cheeks and soft animation of manner as she stood chatting beneath the grand central chandelier in the crowd of admirers. Reginald marveled as he looked at her and remembered her manner of scarcely an hour ago. Did she really possess the art of forgetting herself so utterly? or was it that she was a hypocrite in no common degree? Reginald could not answer himself this question. He made no allowance for the theory of extremes.

She stood leaning against a flower-wreathed column, watching his young wife as one might watch the unfolding of an inscrutable mystery. Nor could he but be proud of her grace and beauty. Yet at the moment he felt that he would have given it all for a face less lovely and a heart that was all his own. Yes, she kept her smiles and dimples and soft, attractive ways for society alone. She had a pride and pleasure in attracting the admiration of strangers, while her husband was kept afar off, and only tolerated as the necessary appendage of a lady in Paris society. So young, too—so much of a child!

Reginald could have groaned aloud as he stood there, with

the scent of hot-house flowers palling upon his senses, and the delicious murmurs of music keeping time to the gay feet of innumerable dancers.

"Monsieur Delamere will not dance?" smilingly questioned his hostess, laying a white satin fan, sparkling with spangles, on his arm.

"Not to-night, madame."

"Monsieur Delamere is not well?" She looked inquiringly at his pale face.

"As well as usual, madame—a little wearied, perhaps. Night after night of gayety is naturally exhausting to one who was not born in Paris."

The lady laughed softly, and passed on to another group of her guests. And Reginald, glancing at a tiny clock, half hidden in ferns and mignonette on a gilded bracket, crossed the room to Ida's side.

"Are you ready to go home, Ida?"

She was talking to a tall, sleepy-looking young Englishman, whose dreamy eyes seemed absolutely fascinated by the Spanish glow and sparkle of her dark beauty.

"By Jove!" Sir Edmund Braine said to himself, "the prettiest thing I've seen in Paris yet. I was beginning to fancy it a deuced bore, but I think I'll not cut it just yet!"

"Ready to go home, Reginald! Why, it is but a few minutes after one!" she exclaimed.

There was an expression of the keenest annoyance in her face. She had, for the instant, forgotten herself, and he was recalling her to the dreary, desolate real.

"I am tired, Ida. All this hollow gayety is inexpressibly sickening to me!" he said, in a low tone.

"You are turning misanthrope, are you?" she asked, bitterly. "But I have promised Sir Edmund the next quadrille. If you will wait for that—"

"Very well."

Mr. Delamere sat down where a partially open window let in the cool, fresh air and the starlight, and waited until the quadrille was over, and Sir Edmund Braine led his flushed, smiling partner back to her seat.

"That was a delightful quadrille, Sir Edmund!" she said, gayly.

"Is it possible that you can enjoy the society of such a coxcomb as that?" demanded her husband, as Sir Edmund turned away, and Ida took his proffered arm.

The whole expression of her face changed as he spoke; a

scornful curve of the lips usurped the place of the bright, animated smile.

"Am I to enjoy nothing?" she asked, haughtily. "In that case, you had better lock me up, or immure me in a convent, as some of these jealous Parisians do their wives, I am told."

"I am not jealous, Ida," he said, stung to the quick by the accusation.

"Heaven knows," she continued, as she passed down the broad stairway, her hand still resting on his arm, "that I have little enough happiness left without turning, of deliberate purpose, from the chance pleasures that happen to lie in my pathway."

"Are you so very unhappy, Ida?"

"I am miserable," she responded, vehemently.

Nothing more was said until they were seated in the close carriage, rolling rapidly homeward. Once, glancing from the window opposite, the glare of light which streamed from some brilliantly illuminated building, she saw, as a carriage flashed swiftly by her, a face, half hidden in the hood of a white cashmere burnoose, but still sufficiently revealed to disclose the exquisite features, and the glitter of costly jewels on throat and bosom. It was Mme. Avioli's face, and Ida shrunk back into the shadow as she saw it. How could she mingle, night after night, with the gay throng of fashion? How could she smile and look happy, with that dark stain forever resting on her soul?

"Ida," said her husband, as these disconnected thoughts fluttered through her mind, "was that Madame Avioli?"

"Yes."

"She has been to the Russian minister's, I suppose."

Ida did not answer.

"Are you still determined to reject her offered friendship?"

"Yes."

"And you will not tell me why?"

"No; I will not tell you why."

"Ida," said her husband, gloomily, "I sometimes think you are determined to estrange me from you."

She was silent; pulling restlessly at the withered leaves of her ball bouquet.

"You are full of mysteries and concealments; you repel my sympathy, and by your strange conduct drive from you those whose friendship is most precious. At times, Ida, I think it is my duty to insist upon an explanation of this systematically strange conduct of yours."

"It would be useless to insist," she answered, slowly and distinctly. "I would die sooner than tell you."

"Ida," he said, annoyed and indignant beyond measure, "you tempt me to speak the words that have more than once risen to my lips of late."

"Speak them, then—it matters little whether you speak or remain silent!"

"Then, Ida, I will say them. I wish I had never beheld you!"

The words, often repressed, yet continually haunting his mind, had found expression at last. And the moment they passed his lips he felt sorry they had been uttered. She made no reply, but sat silently looking out of the carriage window, the gleam of a passing lamp now and then irradiating her pale face, with its wreath of roses, and shining ornaments of soft, lustrous pearl, as beautiful as a statue, and as cold.

"She does not care for what I have said," rose indignantly to Reginald Delamere's mind, but he was mistaken in this surmise. Ida did care, and the bitterest resentment which had ever filled her heart was rankling there, at the cruel words which were to her but a confirmation of the vague doubts that had tormented her many a time before!

The lights in the pleasant drawing-room were burning cheerfully as the husband and wife entered it; the fire glowed on the marble hearth, and Ida's little King Charles spaniel sprung from the warm hearth-rug to greet them.

"Shall I take madame's things?" said Mathilde, who had been dozing over the fire.

Ida gave her the hood and wrappings which she had worn, and as she disappeared into the inner room, sat down in front of the fire, the pearls glimmering in her ears, and her arms shining ivory-white through the folds of her white lace shawl.

"Reginald," she said, for her husband was turning away, "do not go yet. I want to speak to you."

"What is it?"

He came back and stood leaning against the mantel, with folded arms and stern, grave eyes fixed steadfastly upon her face, but there was nothing in his look to melt or soften the strangely desperate mood which had risen up in the heart of the young wife.

"Reginald," she said, "it seems that we have ceased to love each other; that where we would question, and sympathize, we only irritate and annoy."

Mr. Delamere was silent. His heart seemed to turn chill and cold within him, and a choking sensation came into his

throat. His worst fears were being realized; her own lips were telling him that she loved him no longer! Yet, still he stood there, as men have often stood, enduring in silence the agonies of an inquisition worse than death.

"Go on," he said, huskily, as she ceased speaking.

"It would be a mere mockery for us to live together longer, feeling as we do," she went on, slowly. "Reginald, I have been thinking this thing over for some time."

(For some time! This, then, was the key to the enigma that had so puzzled him of late—the altered manners, the changed looks.)

"And," went on Ida, looking fixedly into the fire, "I have come to the conclusion that perhaps it would be better for us to part!"

"To part?" he echoed, hoarsely.

"Yes; to seek, as others have done, whom we hear of every day, the merciful aid of the law!"

"Do you mean that you wish for a divorce?"

"I mean to ask you whether you do not consider it better for us to separate before we make each other more hopelessly miserable. I suppose a divorce could be easily obtained on the ground of incompatibility of disposition."

He did not reply; and, standing as he did in the shadow of the marble angle of the mantel, she could not see the deathly pallor of his face—the look of mental agony which was convulsing every feature.

"We were both children, Reginald," she pursued, "when we were married—indeed, I suppose we are hardly more than that now, but we have drunk the bitter cup of experience to the dregs. We did not know our own minds; we construed passing fancy into love, and entered into the gravest of earthly compacts without any deeper consideration than if it had been a summer-day's holiday, to be enjoyed together. I do not blame you any more than I blame myself; but, oh, Reginald, we have made a terrible mistake!"

"We have, indeed!" he answered, in a low, deep voice.

"It is getting late," said Ida, as the clock struck three and she rose, gathering her loose draperies around her. "But I could not have rested without telling you what is on my mind. Will you take it into consideration, Reginald?"

"I will think of what you have said, Ida," he replied.

She went into the dressing-room, beyond, where Mathilde was waiting for her—and the door closed.

To Reginald Delamere it sounded like the clang of a sepul-

cher door which shuts one out forever from light and life and all God's blessed sunshine.

For to him Ida was already as much dead as if he had seen her in her coffin, with burial-flowers scattered on her breast. Advancing a pace or two, he knelt on the floor in front of the velvet sofa she had occupied, and pressed his lips passionately to the arm of the couch upon which her arm had rested. A single crushed red rose lay upon the floor, where it had fallen from her bosom. He lifted it, and, kissing it as a holy relic is kissed by the most faithful of pilgrims, placed it tenderly in his breast.

"Good-bye," he murmured, softly, "good-bye to the laughing lovely child I married but yesterday; good-bye to the beautiful wife whose smile made my heart's sunshine. I have looked my last upon them forever!"

With these words on his lips he went into his own dressing-room, separated from Ida's by their mutual sleeping apartment, and, bolting the door, sat down to his desk.

A fire was burning there, and Achille's care had supplied the room with a pair of wax-candles, in huge, cumbrous stands of glass, hung with glittering prisms.

Reginald stirred the embers into a brighter blaze, and sat down in front of their red shine to think.

To think! But it was in vain. He could not collect his wandering thoughts, nor systematize the vague visions that thronged through his brain. There was but one all-absorbing idea that filled his heart and mind alike—Ida did not love him! Her own lips had told him so. Ida's affection was estranged from him. There was no loop-hole or possibility of doubt left now to cling to. She herself had asked him for a divorce, as coolly as if hearts could be bartered and exchanged at will.

No, never! a thousand times, never! He would throw himself into the dark tides of the muddy river Seine before he would allow their names—his name and Ida's—to be dragged through the mire of a divorce court! She should have known him better than that. He shuddered involuntarily as he remembered the latest *morceau* of scandal which had rung through and through the salons and promenades of Paris—the divorce suit instituted by M. Gerard du Plessis against Mary, his wife. Were people to pity him as they had pitied this unfortunate husband? Should Ida's sacred name be mentioned with sneers, as Mme. du Plessis's had been? No; whatever fate might be awaiting them, that rock of peril should be avoided.

He sat there mute and motionless, until the gray glimmers of dawn, shining through the green satin curtains, revealed his face, wild and haggard as that of a dead man. At length he sat down to his desk and began to write.

It was broad daylight when at last he folded and sealed the letter he had been engaged in inditing, and addressed it in legible handwriting, leaving it on his desk, where any passing glance could easily discover it.

Then he went out of the room and down the stairs, letting himself out with his latch-key into the bright morning glow of the Paris streets.

CHAPTER XXIV.

GONE!

THE glancing sunbeams were weaving themselves among the gilt arabesques of the huge antique canopy which supported the curtains of Mrs. Delamere's bed, when Mathilde parted them and roused the sleeper with her smooth voice.

"Madame, it is past ten. Will madame please to rise?"

Ida raised herself on her elbow, looking like a pure little pearl amid the web-like laces and embroideries of her night-dress. She had been dreaming of the old rectory at Deepdale, gathering buttercups on the sunny hills with Angie, and sitting in the moonlight with her head on Eleanor's lap; and it was not altogether a pleasant revulsion to come back to Paris, and the huge canopied bedstead, and Mathilde's high-pitched foreign voice.

"Oh, Mathilde! what made you wake me up so soon?" she asked, petulantly. "I was in the midst of—oh, such a delicious dream!"

Mathilde clasped her hands, and professed herself *au désespoir*.

"But it was getting late, and madame always likes to have her chocolate before the morning mail comes in."

"Well," sighed Ida, "I suppose I may as well get up now as ever."

"Madame is tired?"

"Madame is not at all tired," said Ida, sharply. "Give me my slippers, Mathilde, and don't trouble yourself by imagining things that are not so."

"Madame will wear her gold-colored silk wrapper, with the Turkish slippers?"

"Yes, anything you please, only be quick about it, Mathilde."

The clock was pointing to eleven, when at length Mrs. Delamere entered the drawing-room where she generally preferred to take her morning chocolate. It was bright and sunshiny and full of flowers, as usual; but Reginald's chair, with the morning paper hanging over its arm, was vacant.

"Mr. Delamere has not risen yet?" she asked, carelessly, as she sat down to the cup of foaming chocolate which awaited her.

"I have not seen Achille this morning, madame. Shall I ring and inquire?"

"No!"

There was no use, Ida thought, in precipitating an interview, which must necessarily be disagreeable to both wife and husband. Reginald would make his appearance when he was ready; until then she was very happy with the sunshine, and the chocolate, and little Bijou, the long-eared King Charles spaniel.

For she was still sufficient of a child to enjoy the present, even though the dark coming shadows of the future already marred its brightness.

In a few minutes, however, Achille entered, with a countenance of sore bewilderment.

"Madame can, perhaps, tell me where monsieur has gone this morning?"

"Is he gone out?" carelessly questioned Ida, throwing aside the jet-black curls which had fallen over her forehead, as she sat on the hearth-rug, teasing Bijou with the tassel of her wrapper.

"He is not in his room, madame; it may be possible that he has gone for a walk, but that is not monsieur's usual habit."

"I dare say he will be back presently," said Ida. "*Prenez garde, Bijou! vous etes un petit vilain!* Take him away, Mathilde, he is gnawing my poor tassels all in pieces."

As Mathilde carried out the little dog, Achille, who had gone back to his master's room, returned with a grave face.

"A letter, madame!"

"A letter!" cried Ida, springing up with alacrity. "Has the morning mail come in, then?"

"No, madame," said Achille, "it is a letter which I found lying on monsieur's desk directed to madame."

Ida broke the seal in some surprise. What could Reginald mean by writing a letter to her, when personal communication was so much easier?

It commenced:

"My darling Wife,—At least you will let me call you so for the last time. You *are* my darling wife and you will be forever, even though I may never look upon your face again. Ida, it would be useless now to tell you how dearly I love you—how precious you have been to me, even when you most repelled the affection I fain would have lavished upon you. I have neither time nor heart for the reproaches I might heap upon you; but one thing I would have you always remember: I loved you through everything, I love you to the last, though I could not but observe with the keenest anguish, that you were gradually drifting wider and wider apart from my heart. I seek not to know why; I am willing to believe that it was because you were too young at the time of your marriage to understand the state of your own feelings. I am willing to accept my own ruin as the consequence of my own rashness. The fact itself can not be disguised—you have ceased to care for me as a wife should care for her husband.

"Ida, there is but one way out of this labyrinth of sorrow and perplexity. What you spoke to me of last night I could not for a moment tolerate. The name of Delamere is too old and honorable to be spoken lightly. My wife is too dear to me to be placed in the position it would necessarily involve for her. But I am willing to indulge you in what you wish. You shall have a divorce—all but the name. I leave Paris this morning forever. Whither to go I have not yet decided. It can but be a matter of indifference to you, in any event, as long as you never look upon my face again. On my way through London I shall see my lawyer, and settle finally upon you the fortune which will be of no further use to me, except the mere sum which will suffice to keep me from absolute want. Use the money when and how you please. It is the least restitution I can make to you for the evils I have unwillingly brought upon you. It has never purchased happiness for me; perhaps in your possession the curse may be taken off.

"I do not ask you, Ida, to think tenderly of me when I have passed forever out of the channel of your daily life. I only ask that, when you remember me, you will at least give me credit for having loved you, truly and deeply. Is it not a proof of this, when, with my heart as full of tenderness toward you as ever, I can thus give you up, totally and entirely? If death had parted us, I think I could have become reconciled in time, knowing that you had once loved me; but this has all the bitterness of a living death! It is true that I have blighted your life, but what has become of my own?

"Farewell, Ida, my lost, cherished wife! I shall never cross

your pathway again; but my prayers and blessings shall follow you with constant influence. Be happy! be your own blithe, gladsome self, and try to forget that you were ever married to

"R. D."

Ida sat, vaguely gazing upon the paper she held in her hand, long after she had read it, and comprehended all the solemn import of its words. It seemed so impossible, so like an offshoot of her own troubled fancy. Yet there were the words, plain and convincing, in her husband's own handwriting, signed with his own initials. Her husband! She had no husband now!

"Madame is ill?" cried Mathilde, catching the little cassolette from the table, and springing forward. But Ida, recovering herself with a desperate effort, motioned her back again.

"A glass of water, Mathilde—that is all I need."

And when the girl brought the goblet of iced water, Ida had resumed her wonted calmness.

"Go now, Mathilde," she said, with quite self-assertion, "I am quite well."

It was not until Mathilde had reluctantly obeyed, that Ida set herself to read the letter slowly over again.

She had made no mistake. She had misconstrued no line or word. Reginald had gone from her forever. She knew him well enough to look for no hesitating indecision, no change of purpose. What he had determined, after cool and serious thought, that resolve he would carry out until the very end. He had left her, and he never would return. That was the point to which all the ever-changing currents of her thoughts would recur, let them tend which way they might; she need fear his watchful eye, his jealous questionings no more.

Was she glad or sorry? Ida hardly knew. There was an aching at her heart when first she comprehended that she should never see him again—the boy husband, who had cherished and indulged her so fondly in the first bright weeks of their married life—and yet there was an instinct of relief as well. At least he would never fathom the secret of Giuseppe's constant visits—he would never know that he had been married to—the daughter of a murderess! Yes, perhaps, it was better so.

But whither, in this hour of widowhood, for such, to all actual intents and purposes it was, should she turn for advice, counsel, and friendly suggestions? Had it been twenty-four hours earlier, Mme. Avioli would have been the first one to occur to her mind—now she trembled and grew pale at the

bare idea. Acquaintances she had by the score—glittering, sweet-voiced women, whose gloved hands had pressed hers, and whose perfumed lips had breathed the softest words of flattery—but to not one of them, Ida felt, could she turn in this hour of her need. And now, for the first time, she felt how hollow this bright, enchanting Paris really was!

Oh, for Mr. Gresham, with his mild spectacled eyes, and his shining threadbare coat—oh, for gentle Eleanor—even for Geoffrey Moreland's straightforwardness and plain common sense! Here, she felt she was as a stranger in a strange land, and a sensation of sick-hearted loneliness came over her as she realized the utter solitude of her strange, anomalous position.

After all, in what had this rash and unexpected action of her husband benefited her? She was not actually a divorced wife. Yet, how much better was her situation?

"But," answered worldly Commonsense, "you are rich, you have the best and the only weapon for your tournament with the world. Nobody will pause to ask whether you are wife or widow, as long as the atmosphere of gold surrounds you with its rarefied light. Fear not, you will be welcomed in every circle, received at every fireside!"

Yet never to see Reginald again! Ida rose up, unconsciously, as the idea recurred to her mind. She felt, driven by the impulse of the moment, that she must go to him—follow him—write to him—at all hazard. But whither should she write? whither should she go? No, she was utterly powerless. She did not even, in her ignorance of the commonest details of business life, know the name of his banker or his legal adviser. She must wait until they put themselves in communication with her, until such time as this she was quite without expedient.

What a strange, lonely feeling it was! Robinson Crusoe on his desert island must have felt something like this poor little deserted wife, cowering among her satin cushions and velvet divans, with fiery topaz glancing on neck and arms, and her costly draperies gleaming as if they were woven of spun gold.

"Oh, Reginald! Reginald!" she faltered, scarce knowing what she said, but hailing the faint sound of her own voice as a relief, "come back to me! I am so lonely—so miserable!"

But there was no answering sound, no footstep hastening to her side. Reginald had gone from her forever; no voice nor cry of hers could bring him back. It had been her own doing after all, why should she repine? It had brought her exemption—rest—freedom.

No, not freedom, as long as Giuseppe Antonardi lived! Ida

remembered this with a despairing pang. But at least she would not be compelled to wear the mask of deception, to hide the wounds that were sapping away the foundations of her heart.

Yes, there was some relief in this. What should she do? she asked herself. What steps would it be best that she should take, now that no further constraint was placed upon her movements? Perhaps it would be wise to remain in Paris until she heard from the lawyers to whom Reginald had alluded in his letter. Achille, Mathilde, and Mme. Anastase were surely as good protectors as a little girl of sixteen could require. In the same thought came the question what was she to say to the servants, these curious all-observing quidnuncs whose inquisitiveness was so much more difficult to baffle than the well-bred curiosity of the upper circles.

She rang the bell. Mathilde answered it at once.

"Send Achille to me," was her order.

Achille came, polite and observant.

"What was it that madame was pleased to want?"

"Achille," said Mrs. Delamere, in a matter-of-course sort of way, "your master has gone away for some months."

"On business, madame?"

"Yes, on business. During his absence you are to conduct the establishment as usual."

Achille, who had begun to droop at the mortifying idea that his master had gone away without requiring his services, now brightened at the responsibility which had devolved on his broad Gascon shoulders.

"Madame, it will be my pleasure to see that you are in no way inconvenienced by monsieur's absence. Monsieur knew in whom to confide," and the faithful Achille laid his hand upon his heart, in theatrical fashion.

"I dare say you will manage very nicely, Achille," said Ida, disregarding his dramatic effects. "I shall trust entirely in your good faith and judgment. You may go now."

"There," she thought, leaning back on the sofa, as Achille left the room. "It won't be Achille's fault if the whole *quartier* doesn't know of it in twenty-four hours!"

Presently Mathilde came to her mistress with a card.

"If madame pleases."

It was a scented piece of pasteboard, on which was engraved the name of "Colonel St. Argyle," in exquisite Old English letters.

"I am not at home," said Ida, coldly. "Remember,

Mathilde, that henceforward I am never at home to Colonel St. Argyle."

She tore the card in two and laid it on the fire, watching the blaze with a cold smile. For Ida Delamere felt that for the future she could not be too careful in her acquaintances.

CHAPTER XXV.

WEARING BLACK.

IDA had not long to wait for the expected communication of her husband's business agents. In something less than a week from the time of his departure, a letter arrived from Messrs. Bangs, Leary & Co., Leadenhall Street, London, stating that, in obedience to arrangements made by Reginald Delamere, Esquire, they held themselves in readiness to cash any checks she might see fit to draw upon them, and hoping that, by strict attention to her business affairs, they might be considered worthy of the continued charge of her fortune.

It was a polite and well-worded business note, and Ida nodded composedly as she put it away in the satin-wood writing-desk Reginald had bought for her when they passed through London on their wedding-tour, *en route* for Paris.

"You must never let me find the letters of any other man than myself treasured here, Ida," he had charged her playfully, when he showed her the silk-lined compartment for the reception of notes.

And this cold, brief note from his business men was the first that she had ever laid there, save the letter which told her of his living death, as far as she was concerned. They had never yet been separated, consequently there had been no occasion for writing to each other. There would never be any more letters exchanged between them now.

Ida locked the desk and attached the key to a tiny ring of gold which hung from the end of her watch-chain, thinking how little they had either of them thought of so sudden and eternal a parting as this, in all those bright days of their honey-moon.

"But it is better so," she thought; "it is better so!"

Mathilde entered while her young mistress was still standing looking at the toy of satin-wood and gold, with the medallions of cameos gemming its top and the glistening chains that festooned its sides.

"Would madame please to see Giuseppe Antonardi?"

"I suppose so," said Ida, tightening her under-lip with scarcely repressed annoyance. "Where is he, Mathilde?"

"In madame's drawing-room."

"Very well, I will come to him."

Giuseppe was standing with his back to the fire when she entered the apartment, his turbid, hazel eyes fixed in a species of artistic rapture on a tiny landscape framed in crimson velvet outlined with flat bars of gold which hung above the sofa on the opposite wall.

He bowed low as Ida advanced.

"Truly," he said, "madame has taste the most marvelous. Cardinal Perimond has no such picture as that in his famous collection, which I did myself yesterday the honor to see!"

Without paying any regard to his expression of opinion on the fine arts, Ida sat down on a low chair, where she faced him directly.

"Well, Giuseppe, what is it now?"

Giuseppe looked hard at her. He was a quick observer of the minutest changes in voice or manner, and something in Ida's tone told him that he did not stand on the same level as regarded her that he had all along occupied. Somehow she had gained an advantage, and he had lost it. Giuseppe marveled within himself as to what it could be.

"Madame asks in jest," he said, with profound humility; "madame knows my poverty, my humble reliance on her noble generosity."

"Your poverty!" repeated Ida, meaningly. "Giuseppe, how long is it since I gave you five hundred pounds?"

"Do we measure time by hours and days, madame? or by reverses and accidents the most deplorable? Alas, I have lived a life-time of them since last I saw madame."

"Giuseppe, you are squandering away my money at the gaming-table!" said Ida, slowly fixing his guilty, wandering eyes with her own steady gaze.

He did not attempt to deny the charge.

"Madame, play is an art—I study it—I worship it—I lose by it, and am content. Fortune will one day recompense her votary. There is no such thing as chance—it is a theory of sequences which can not prove incorrect. But, to succeed, one must have patience."

"And money, too, I should infer," said Ida, dryly.

"Madame has said it!" meekly assented Giuseppe.

"But, Giuseppe, I do not exactly see how all this is to end. Am I to remain forever the victim of your rapacity?"

Giuseppe seemed to wave back the obnoxious word with a motion of his white ringed hand.

"Madame misrepresents me. I am not rapacious; it is but little of madame's abundance that I ask."

"Little!" echoed Ida, bitterly. "Do you know how much money, first and last, you have extorted from me?"

Giuseppe elevated his eyebrows.

"It is best not to count these things."

"You think so! I have reason to judge differently!"

"But when one remembers, madame, the silence, the faithful devotion with which I guard a secret, which—"

He paused abruptly, warned by the motion of Ida's uplifted hand, and the flash of her eyes.

"Giuseppe!"

"Pardon, madame. I have been rash; I did but wish—"

"Our interview has lasted long enough!" said Ida, rising haughtily. "You want money, and I am in your power to a certain degree."

Giuseppe looked at her, wondering what these last words might signify, but he merely bowed his head by way of an answer in the affirmative.

"How much is it?"

"If but a trifling hundred pounds might—"

"Enough—and how long will that satisfy your greed?"

"Madame, I shall not again intrude upon your kindness at present."

"So you always say, Giuseppe."

"I mean it, madame, this time."

"Very well."

Without another word she sat down at the table and filled up a check on Messrs. Bangs, Leary & Co. to the amount of one hundred pounds, signing her name boldly to its printed form.

Giuseppe glanced first at the signature, then at Ida, as he took the paper. It was a riddle he was as yet scarcely astute enough to read.

"I have seen *her* twice," he said, slowly, "since I was here last. Once at the door of the Grand Opera House—my faith, but the jewels shone like fire upon her, as she stood there, waiting for her laggard carriage to be announced; once in the street, when she drove by, while I could but just catch a glimpse of her face."

"Did she see you?" asked Ida, who had turned pale.

"No, I did not mean that she should. The eagle swoops but once upon its prey."

"What do you mean by that, Giuseppe?" demanded Ida.

"Was she not the murderess of my master?" he asked, with livid lips and flaming eyes.

"Then give me back that check," said Mrs. Delamere, resolutely, extending her hand. "My gold has purchased you in vain!"

"Again madame has misapprehended me," said Giuseppe, reproachfully. "Does madame think I can forget that she, too, has the blood of the L'Echelles in her veins? No, never! She is safe enough from my denouncements; but, nevertheless, the time shall come for her to know that others are aware of the crime she has committed!"

"Giuseppe," said Ida, coldly, "you have gained the object of your visit. There is no need for prolonging it—now go!"

"Madame," interjected the Italian, "I—"

"Go, I say!"

And Giuseppe knew from the expression of her eyes and voice, as she spoke the words, that there was no alternative for him but to obey.

No one who has not been thrown at the mercy of circumstances can fully learn the measure of his own character. Thoughts, feelings, and impulses lie dormant in the human soul, like the treasures in the heart of a mountain, and they are to be developed only by the miner's shaft of circumstance. Up to this year of her life, Ida Delamere had been a thoughtless, irresponsible child, dependent upon others for the veriest trifle of her daily existence. Now she was a woman, self-reliant, and quick at expedient—a child, alas! no longer.

After mature deliberation, she had made her plans to leave Paris in a week or two, but in the meanwhile she was engaged to several balls, receptions, and *soirées* which she judged it inexpedient to give up.

"I will give occasion for no whispering innuendo or barbed arrow of scandal," she thought to herself, with an involuntary straightening of the lithe, slender form. "I will carry my royal state to the very last."

And she did so. Mme. d'Ancour, who had been confidentially told by Ida that her husband was called suddenly away on business, volunteered, with great *empressement*, to become her chaperon wherever she wished to go, and Ida accepted the offer.

"It will be but a short time," she said, "for I shall proceed to London in a very few days."

Mme. d'Ancour professed herself quite miserable at the idea of losing Mrs. Delamere, but in the meanwhile it would give her, yes, the greatest of happiness to accompany so charming

a friend into the various salons of their mutual acquaintances —and M. d'Ancour, a little, bustling man, with a shining bald top to his head and the freshest of sixty-year-old complexions, agreed with her most enthusiastically.

"So I am provided for," thought Ida. "Well, the hollow show must come to an end sooner or later, then—then I will go back to Deepdale again."

But she had not yet decided upon what she was to tell them all at Deepdale. How could she account for Reginald's abandonment of the name and rights of a husband? What story could she fabricate that would have a sufficiently fair show of truth to bear the searching gaze of Mr. Gresham's eyes, the tender inquiry of Eleanor's face?

Should she tell them the actual facts? She could not entirely; and, after all, was half a lie less egregious than a whole one? The secret that she had a mother—a mother whose hand had been dipped in the crimson stain of murder—that must be preserved inviolable, at all hazards. To no human ear could she confide a story like this! No human sympathy could be allowed to soothe the soreness of her solitary wounded heart.

"I must tell them that we were unsuited to each other," she thought; "that Reginald was jealous and quick-tempered, and that I, perhaps, was not sufficiently yielding, and so we deemed it best to part. And yet—how can I? How mildly Papa Gresham's kind eyes will look reproach at me! How they will all remember, even if they do not actually recall to my mind in so many words, the warnings by which they strove to turn me from my waywardness? Oh, it will be bitter, beyond expression, to endure all this!"

And in the contemplation of these possibilities, Ida was almost tempted to give up the idea of returning to the rural Connecticut valleys, where she had been so happy once; it seemed to her now that it was years instead of months ago.

"But I will not think of these things now," she resolved. "I should go mad if I thought of everything that hangs like a shadow over my future. It will be time enough when I am on the verge of my departure from Paris."

There was to be a ball at the English embassador's one night—a ball which half Paris had been talking and dreaming about for the last month. And Ida Delamere was among the fortunate few who had received an invitation. The empress was to be there, with all the ladies of her court, and Mme. d'Ancour congratulated herself that her first chaperonage of

the beautiful young American was to be to such a scene of splendor and exclusiveness as this.

"And what is it, *ma belle*, that you will wear?" she complacently demanded of Ida, as she sat in the latter's drawing-room, her purple satin robes spreading in ample shining fullness about her, and her face beaming with satisfaction and complacency.

"Black, madame!"

"Black!" Mme. d'Ancour actually recoiled in the plenitude of her astonishment. "Black to a fête like this of the high-born Englishman?"

"Yes, black; why not?"

"*Ma chère*, they wear black at the convents—the funerals—"

"The empress wore black velvet at Madame d'Essey's last week."

"Yes; but the empress—*she* indulges a taste *bizarre* as well as imperial."

"That is precisely what I mean to do, madame."

"But widows wear black—you, *ma belle*, are not a widow."

Ida shuddered slightly; something in Mme. d'Ancour's words made the color die slowly out of her cheeks as she sat there, never lifting her drooped eyelids.

"No," she said, seeing that Mme. d'Ancour waited as if for a reply; "I am not a widow, certainly." While her heart added the sequel: "Perhaps it would be better if I were!"

"Then why this strange idea?"

"Oh, it is a whim—a fancy. I have worn every other color until I am tired of their garish glow and brilliance. Remonstrance is unavailing, madame"—with an arch little raising of the jetty eyebrows—"for black is to be the color of my ball-dress!"

"Nay, then, *mon amie*," said Mme. d'Ancour, with imperturbable good nature, "black let it be. But you will look beautiful in whatever you choose to wear—of that I am quite assured!"

Mme. d'Ancour was quite convinced of the wisdom of this last assertion on the evening of the ball in question, when her carriage drew up in front of Mrs. Delamere's residence, and she rustled up the stairway greatly to the astonishment of old Anastase.

"Blue silk and diamonds, and blue plumes in her hair," croaked the old concierge, "and she must be a woman of my age, too; it's a fine thing to be rich and cast one's years behind

one, but *n'importe; le bon Dieu* is not to be deceived by their grimaces and rouge, and death will find them out just as soon as if they did not run away from him in a carriage-and-four!"

Ida sat reading, or pretending to read, all ready and waiting for Mme. d'Ancour. She rose with a smile as the fat old lady who had formed the subject of Anastase's unfavorable comment entered.

Mme. d'Ancour stopped short, with a little exclamation of delight.

"Ah, *ma belle!*" she exclaimed. "You are resplendent! You are like a tropic night!"

Ida was robed in a black dress of some floating gauze-like material, embroidered all over in tiny stars of silver thread, which gleamed and shone dimly, whichever way she turned. A silver sash, crossing her breast, and passing beneath her left arm, hung in long fringed ends of silver nearly to the hem of her dress, and a coronet of natural flowers, the white wax-like stars of the jasmine, was loosely twisted among her curls. Pearls at her throat and wrists, and a silver fan, completed this singular and yet enchanting toilet, which perhaps suited Ida's style more completely than anything she had yet worn.

"You like it then?" said Ida, almost carelessly; the fancy had passed off now, and she hardly cared for the impression her costume should make, one way or the other.

"It is lovely," cried Mme. d'Ancour, "and yet," as she led the way down-stairs to the carriage where her husband was taking a drowsy succession of short naps, "it will keep occurring to me that you look too much like *une jeune veuve*, a young widow, *ma chère.*"

She laughed as she spoke, but Anastase from her little sanctum heard it and sniffed venomously over the contents of her horn snuff-box.

"Who talks of *jeunes veuves?*" grumbled Anastase, under her breath. "Is it then the old painted parrot? and does she not know, *ma foi*, that with a wife who has not yet been married, it is unlucky? But she—what could one expect of her with her tricks?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

TIDINGS OF EVIL.

THE evening at the English embassador's was even pleasanter than Ida had anticipated possible. Her peculiar dress, unique in fancy and bold in style, her beauty, fresh and dazzling with the additional charm of a certain pensiveness that

had characterized it lately, and the unstudied grace and piquancy of her manner, secured brilliant success at this the closing grand festivity of the season.

Had Lady Bernmouth been there, she would have been more incensed than ever at the increase of admiration accorded to this "black-eyed American child," as she had called Mrs. Delamere, but she was in Rome, enjoying the quieter gayeties of the Eternal City, and Ida had to be contented with nursing the mortal enmity of sundry other high-born and titled ladies, who could not find it in their hearts to forgive the capital sins of youth, beauty, and unaffected fascination of manner.

She enjoyed it all. For a brief season she seemed to forget the trials of the past, the troubles that yet loomed darkly in the future, and basked, like a human butterfly, in the sunshine of the present.

And when Mme. d'Ancour, yawning portentously behind her fan, told her that it was time to go home, Ida exclaimed aloud:

"Is it possible that it is so late? After this one galop, madame—I have promised it."

Mme. d'Ancour assented smilingly.

"One is not to forget that one was young one's self," was her good-humored comment, as she stood leaning on the arm of her somnolent lord and master, who was very nearly asleep on his feet.

"I have enjoyed it so much, madame," Ida said, as she parted from Mme. d'Ancour at the door of her hotel.

"*Bien*, my child, that is well," nodded the old lady, as the carriage door was closed.

Mathilde was waiting in the anteroom.

"There is one waiting to see madame," she said, as Mrs. Delamere entered, "in the drawing-room beyond."

"One? Whom do you mean? Not "—and a crimson flush of anger crossed her forehead as the idea occurred to her—"not Giuseppe?"

"No, madame; an Englishman—a stranger; I never saw him before."

For Mathilde had a keen memory for faces.

"Has he been waiting long?" asked Ida, slowly unclasping the cords of her white cashmere wrappings and drawing off her gloves.

"He reached here two hours ago. At first he was going to you, at the hotel of Monsieur l'Ambassadeur; but I explained to him that you would soon be home, and he has waited. Madame is not usually so late as this," said Mathilde, with a

glance at the clock, whose dial indicated the hour of four in the morning.

"It is very strange," thought Ida. She could not imagine who should possibly come to see her at such an hour as this. "Could it be"—and her heart gave a sudden spasmodic leap—"could it be Reginald, weary of their separation, longing to behold her again?"

What nonsense! And Ida bit the dewy velvet of her crimson lip until the fresh blood started, sharply indignant with herself. Had not Mathilde seen and spoken with the stranger? And, without pausing to indulge in any more fruitless conjecture, Mrs. Delamere walked straight through the anteroom, and, turning the gilded door-handle of the inner apartment, entered.

A tall gentlemanly looking young man, of about five-and-twenty, rose from his seat, beside a table heaped with books and magazines, as Ida's footsteps sounded on the threshold. At the first glance she could see that he was handsome and dark, and a total stranger to her; nor could she fail to observe the surprised admiration with which he regarded her lovely face and the floating black dress, whose skirts, gemmed with silvery gleams, had the same effect as if she had drawn a train of stars after her.

"Have I the honor of speaking to Mrs. Delamere?"

"I am Mrs. Delamere."

He drew a card from his pocket.

"Allow me to introduce myself to you as Jerome Leary, the younger brother and head-clerk of Mr. Leary, of the firm of Bangs, Leary & Co., of Leadenhall Street, London."

Ida looked at the card, which confirmed his words, and inclined her head courteously.

"Pray seat yourself again, sir. I presume you have come on business relative to the property in your charge?"

Ida flattered herself that she was exceedingly business-like in her terms; and wondered, as she nestled down into a chair, whether Mr. Leary would detect her utter ignorance of all financial affairs.

"No, madame, I have not," said Mr. Leary, growing painfully embarrassed in his manner. "I am sent specially by the firm to break to you news which—which—"

"News!" repeated Ida, fixing her large, dark eyes on his face, with a grave, innocent surprise. "I do not know what news you can possibly have to impart to me which can embarrass you so much."

"I had almost hoped," began Mr. Leary, "until I heard

that you were at the ball of the English Embassy, that rumor had preceded me, and I might possibly be spared the painful task of—"

Again he stopped, his eyes riveted to the silver stars which glistened in the hem of her dress.

"Mr. Leary," said Ida, a vague sensation of suffocating terror seeming to steal over her, "I beg you will state at once and distinctly what you mean?"

"I will do so, madame, if you will prepare yourself for bad news—for the worst news, in fact!"

He was watching her now with painful interest, as the surgeon watches the pulse of a patient about to undergo some fearful surgical operation. She felt the intentness of his troubled gaze, yet she could not have spoken her mind, had it been to save her life.

"It is but a brief while," he went on, "since your husband left you, Mrs. Delamere. You may, perhaps, already have been expecting his return. If so, let me undeceive you; he will not be able to return at present."

"Is he ill?"

Ida tried to syllable the words, but they seemed to die away, soundless and unspoken, on her lips. Possibly, however, Mr. Jerome Leary's senses were sharper than hers, or perhaps he read the quivering motion of her lips, for he answered, in a low, grave voice:

"He is very ill! Mrs. Delamere, he is dead!"

"Dead! my husband—dead?"

She sunk back so perfectly colorless that Mr. Leary sprung to call for help, fancying that she was about to swoon away, but she beckoned him to resume his seat.

"No—no! I shall not faint. I shall be better in a minute. It was the shock—so sudden, so unexpected. Have I been dreaming, or did you tell me that my husband was dead?"

"Alas! you are only in too full possession of your waking senses, Mrs. Delamere!"

"How did it happen—when?" she gasped.

"It was on the 13th of February last, in the Bay of Naples, off the southward coast of Italy. Mr. Delamere, with some friends, had started to cross from the Island of Ischia in a little boat, which unfortunately was too lightly constructed to sustain the sudden gusts which are at times not unusual in that climate. A squall, unforeseen even by the experienced old sailors who manned the boat, caused it to be driven violently, and upset beyond the reach of help, and all on board perished in the waves!"

His voice, low pitched and full of sympathetic earnestness, sunk into silence. Ida sat looking vaguely at the floor, trying to comprehend the full meaning of what she had just listened to. The last words seemed to reverberate like a mournful echo through her brain.

"Perished!" she repeated, in a low, strange tone—"perished!"

"Mr. Delamere's remains, washed on shore the next day at Ischia," resumed Mr. Leary, speaking as softly as if he were himself in the presence of the corpse, "are interred at Naples, and will be subject to your wish, should you prefer to have them reburied nearer home. The melancholy tidings reached us only this morning, through a letter from our branch house at Naples—Carodenti & Co."

Another silence ensued, during which the low ticking of the clock sounded ominously loud in the ears of Mr. Jerome Leary; but Ida still sat in utter silence.

"Are there any arrangements you would like to have us make for you, either here, in Naples, or in London?" he inquired at last, growing nervous in the strange hush which surrounded him.

Ida shook her head.

No, she could think of none.

"Nor in any way in which we could be of use to you in settling your affairs or completing any unfinished business which may possibly cause you annoyance?"

"You are very kind," said Ida, speaking languidly, as if every word were an effort to her; "but there is no necessity for your troubling yourself."

"It will become at once our duty and our pleasure to relieve you of any unnecessary care and annoyance. Should you think of anything we can do, I shall remain in Paris for a few days subject to your orders. It is, perhaps, my duty to inform you," he added, after a brief silence, "that you are the sole and unencumbered inheritrix, through the provisions of a will executed in London just before Mr. Delamere's departure for Italy, of the whole of his very extensive fortune and estates, both in the United States and the Island of Cuba. This document will be proven as soon as practicable. In the meantime we hold ourselves in readiness to advance you any and all sums of which you may stand in need."

Ida listened mechanically to him, hearing the words without comprehending more than their empty sound.

"Mr. Leary," she said, looking piteously up into his face, "this is very sudden and startling. Will you please tell it to

me all over again? My brain seems to wander. I think I have been dreaming and can not have understood you!"

Mr. Jerome Leary poured out a glass of water from a cut-glass *carafe* upon the table.

"If you were to drink some of this, madame, I think it would relieve you."

Ida drank without a remonstrance.

"Thank you. Now will you explain it all?"

Once more the young representative of the great London firm slowly repeated the tidings which had seemed to Ida too awful and sudden to be true. There was no mistaking them —she was a widow. The young husband, whose romantic devotion had been so like a fairy-tale, whose love had almost at times terrified her in its intensity of devotion, was but a name and a memory now. She tried to think of him as dead and buried in a foreign land, and then she remembered that it had been to Naples they were going when wearied of the bright diversities of Paris. She recalled the plans they had made for the early spring, which they were to spend in Italy—the impossible routes she had proposed, and the merry way in which he had laughed at her childish impracticabilities. He had preceded her to Naples—and now? A corpse, placed beneath one of those pictured old altars she had remembered years ago, and there laid away to everlasting rest, where the storms and sorrows of life should never reach him more.

She had grown so ghastly pale that Jerome Leary hurried across the room and called to Mathilde.

"Your mistress is taken very ill," he said, hastily. "She has had bad news. Her husband is dead."

Mathilde broke into a torrent of French lamentations, sobbing and crying vehemently, while her mistress sat quite quiet and passive.

"Is there no lady-friend she could send for to-night?" asked Mr. Leary. "She should not be left alone at such a time as this."

"There is Madame d'Ancour," whispered Mathilde, "and there is Lady Helen Dalton, and—"

"Give me the address of one of them; I will go at once."

But Ida checked him.

"No," she said, faintly; "no one. I would far, far rather be alone until—until the first shock is over. Mathilde will do all that I can require."

"But, Mrs. Delamere—"

"You are very kind," persisted Ida, "but I would rather be alone."

"Shall I call again in the morning to receive your orders?"

"I shall have no orders to give. I do not wish to be disturbed."

"The day after, then?"

"Yes—no—I can not tell. Oh!" in a voice of wailing entreaty, "if you would only stop talking to me. I want to think—I want to be alone."

Mr. Leary withdrew, giving to Mathilde a slip of paper on which he had hastily penciled an address, "Hôtel du Louvre, No. 177."

"In case of need," he explained to the bewildered French girl.

When he was gone, this irresponsible messenger of bad tidings, Ida seemed to breathe more freely.

"Take off my things, Mathilde," she said, in a low voice, "and let me lie down in bed."

She shrunk with a sort of loathing from the glittering dress and wreath of withered flowers as Mathilde removed them with light, expeditious fingers. She had been waltzing in those, with pearls gleaming round her neck, and the glad, mocking sound of music in her ears, while he, her husband of less than a year, was lying, cold and coffined, in his grave. Why did no warning voice sound in her ears? Why did no premonition from the land of spirits tell her of the moment when the heart that had been so entirely her own grew cold and pulseless forever? She had not loved him as a wife should love her husband—her heart had never fully answered the cravings of his deep, unutterable affection; yet, now that he was gone, she forgot all the boy-and-girl altercations, and remembered only that he was Reginald, and that he was dead.

"Will madame try to sleep a little while now?" said Mathilde, as she brought to her a seething cup of some hot drink, mixed by Anastase, and recommended as a sovereign tonic in case of nervousness or overweariness. Ida swallowed it without knowing what it was.

"Yes," she said, laying her cold cheek against the snowy lace ruffles of the pillow, and letting her eyelids fall heavily over the eyes that were like burning coals in her head; but she could not sleep at all; and morning, darting its cruel sunbeams through the half-drawn curtains, as if there were no death and darkness in the world, found her still wakeful, and brooding over the great change which had come over her life.

"Did I not see it, then?" croaked old Anastase, brandishing her fork over the frying-pan which contained her morning meal when Mathilde, fancying her mistress still slumber-

ing, crept noiselessly down-stairs to whisper the details of the terrible tidings which were already noised throughout the whole building. "It was the chattering old parrot, and the black dress which madame *would* wear. These things don't come by chance, and why did she speak thus—the old woman with the painted face? *Une jeune veuve*, indeed. She will never be *une jeune veuve*, I'll warrant her. But, all the same, I am sorry for our young lady. Heaven help her!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NEW COURIER.

MME. AVIOLI'S reception hours on this particular day of the week were from twelve to three, and she had hardly entered her receiving-room—a high-ceiled apartment, hung with draperies of violet silk, and furnished with a taste whose details seemed to set expense at defiance, when M. de Ramirou was announced.

He came in, looking flushed and excited.

"You have heard the news, Madame Avioli?" he cried, scarcely pausing for the ordinary matter-of-course greetings of the morning.

"I have heard no special news," said Mme. Avioli, bending toward a vase of flowers to break off a sprig of sweet-scented geranium. "What has happened?"

"You have not, then, learned it?"

"Learned what, Monsieur de Ramirou? You speak in riddles."

"The sudden death of Monsieur Delamere, the husband of *la belle Americaine.*"

"Dead! Reginald Delamere dead!" Mme. Avioli stood in the middle of the room, white as the japonicas which filled the flower-baskets at her side. "It is not possible—it can not be!"

"It is all over Paris this morning, madame," asserted M. de Ramirou, with the complacency of one who is the first to impart a startling piece of news.

"How did it happen? Have you learned the details?"

"Not entirely, madame. He was drowned in the Bay of Naples a few days ago."

"And Ida?"

M. de Ramirou shook his head. "Nay, you yourself knew, madame, that she was at the ball of the English Embassy last night, poor child, gay as a bird, and all unconscious of what Fate had prepared for her."

"I must go to her at once," said Mme. Avioli, hurriedly. "You will excuse me, I am sure, Monsieur de Ramirou. She is so young, and she has so few real friends!"

Certainly, of course the polite little Frenchman would excuse madame; he had but looked in on her on his way to other friends. The poor young widow would, doubtless, need Mme. Avioli's friendly presence as soon as possible; and so M. de Ramirou bowed himself out of the room, while Mme. Avioli violently pulled the bell-cord.

"Tell Sebastian to bring up the carriage at once—let him lose no time!"

Sebastian obeyed promptly, but to Mme. Avioli it seemed an age before she was seated in the carriage, driving toward the abode of the newly made widow.

"She will surely receive me now," thought Mme. Avioli. "In such a moment of sudden affliction as this the caprices of a thoughtless girl will be forgotten, and she will remember then I loved her and was his friend!"

Mathilde admitted her with swollen eyes and handkerchief to her face.

Was it, then, madame? She had learned of the great, the irreparable loss which had befallen them. Yes, Mme. Delamere was quite alone, and so still; of a stillness which made her, Mathilde, tremble. She did not weep. She sat and looked straight before her. Mathilde had seen marble figures like the poor, young madame. Nobody could rouse her. Should she take in the countess's card?

Mme. Avioli shook her head.

"I will not send in my card. I will go to her at once. No, Mathilde, do not announce me."

And with light steps and noiseless motion the countess entered the semi-darkened room, where Ida was sitting in a white wrapper, looking into the coral shine of the fire, one cheek leaning on her hand, and her loose curls, unconfined by any hand or fillet, hanging in jet-black rings round her ashen pale face.

Mme. Avioli came close to her side before the newly made widow was conscious of her presence in the room.

"Ida," she whispered—"my poor, poor Ida!"

Ida recoiled as if the countess's soft voice had been the hiss of a serpent. She rose to her feet at once.

"You here?" she said, in cold, bitter accents. "Who dared admit you? Have you no respect, then, for the sanctity of death?"

"I have come to console you, Ida," began the countess, faltering. "I—"

"I will have none of your consolation," said Ida, resolutely. "Your very presence here is an insult!"

"But, Ida—"

"Do not call me by that name again! I am 'Ida' only to my friends. Madame Avioli, will you leave this room, or shall I ring for Achille to show you to the door?"

Mme. Avioli stood, her color changing from red to white, in the middle of the room.

"You will not let me comfort you, Ida? You will not let me sympathize with you in the loss you have sustained?"

"Your sympathy would be worse than the most utter solitude," returned Ida, seeming to freeze into marble, as she stood there, unrelenting and haughty.

"Ida," burst out Mme. Avioli, with clasped hands, "he trusted in me, he who is gone! Is that no testimony in my favor?"

"No," Ida returned, unheedingly. "He did not know you. I do!"

"How do you mean, know me, Ida? Those words are perfectly incomprehensible to me!"

"Madame Avioli, your presence is distasteful to me; your proffered sympathy only an insult. From this moment I will never speak to you again. Leave the room, and leave me to my own sorrow. In that at least there is no sin—no shame!"

She rang the bell.

"Mathilde, show Madame Avioli to the door."

The countess obeyed, pale and passive. To her Ida was an enigma; yet she had dearly loved the girl, and would fain have comforted her in the first shock of her widowhood. Now, repelled and driven away, she could but weep and wonder.

"It is a strange enigma," she pondered; "but some day it will be unraveled. At least, I can do no more."

So the first weeks of Ida's bereavement passed away. Day after day she resolved to write to Mrs. Gresham; but day after day elapsed, and still she had not performed the task. There was one consolation—now; at least she should not be compelled to tell the story of their separation by mutual agreement. Death had hidden all the secrets of their unhappiness, and no one would now require an explanation of what would be so difficult to explain away. The shock had been sharp and sudden at first; yet Ida could not but feel it a relief, now that she was left free and unfettered, still under the age of seventeen.

"It is strange," she thought—"so strange that I can as yet hardly understand it myself. Most girls of my age are just standing on life's threshold, their hearts untouched, their destinies untried, the world lying before them like the glittering landscape of a picture. It is not so with me. I have lived out my life."

And she was not yet seventeen! Her plans were as yet quite unsettled, and she was resolving that the very next day she would spend the morning in writing to her friends at Deepdale Rectory, when, on a bright March noontide, Mme. d'Ancour was announced.

"My dear," said the good-hearted French matron, "I have come to make you a proposal. I would have spoken before, but your grief was too new, your sorrow too sudden."

"Yes," said Ida, rather evading the subject of her tragic bereavement. "What is it, madame?"

"Have you as yet decided what to do or where to go?"

"No, not entirely"—not at all, she might have said with truth.

"Then, my dear, you will perhaps consent to gratify me by joining Monsieur d'Ancour and myself on a journey—a series of travel, I may perhaps call it, which we promise ourselves to take. We are old people—we are quiet—we travel to rest, to recreate ourselves. We shall be gone one year—two years—perhaps longer, perhaps shorter, as the fancy takes us. We shall visit Rome, Switzerland, the Holy Land—the East, wherever our inclinations lead us. There will be no set programme, no given time to go or come. Your society, my dear, would give us something of youth, of brightness, which God has denied us when He gave us no children. And you—it will not be the worse for you, I assure myself. You need change now, of all times in the world."

"Yes," said Ida, musingly, "it was very kind of you to think of me, Madame d'Ancour."

"How is it, then, my child?" demanded the plump old countess, evidently exhilarated by the hope that her request had not been made in vain. "You will go?"

"Yes, I will go with you."

"And how soon can your preparations be made?"

"I have no preparations, madame. I can go at any time."

"*Bien!*" ejaculated Mme. d'Ancour. "We will then set forth early in the week—and I go to delight my husband with the assurance that our journey is to be enlivened with your presence and companionship. You are like a favorite child to

my good husband, *ma petite* Ida; he will be glad to hear what I have to tell!"

And Mme. la Comtesse d'Ancour went gleefully away, unconscious of the scornful gaze of derision with which Anastase regarded her as she unlocked the door to let her out!

"It will be the best plan," thought Ida, when she was left alone. "I could not have remained in Paris by myself, and somehow I can not go back to Deepdale just yet and answer all their questions, and darken the sunshine of their peaceful home with my black garments and the horrible consciousness of the secret which I can tell to no one. Some day, perhaps, I may go back, but not now. In the meantime—" And she drew the inlaid satin-wood desk, which had been Reginald's gift, toward her, and wrote a long, loving, confidential letter to Eleanor Gresham, in which she told her of her widowhood, and her resolve to pass the next year or two in traveling with her friends, M. le Comte d'Ancour and his wife, closing with many expressions of affection toward all the quiet household in the Connecticut valley. "There," she thought, with a sigh, lighting a scented wax taper to seal the epistle with its heavy splash of black wax, "that is done. How they will all wonder when they see the deep black border round the envelope. I should not be surprised," she added, bitterly, to herself, "if they mourned for poor Rex quite as deeply and sincerely as I do. I hate myself sometimes when I think how cold and impassive I am; but how can I help it? I never should have become his wife, for every day that I live I am more deeply convinced of the fact that I did not really love him—poor, poor Rex!"

Nearly a week had passed, when one day, as Mathilde was busied in packing her mistress's mourning habiliments in the huge traveling-trunks which were ranged in the dressing-room, Anastase called in a shrill tone to her:

"Is it not twelve o'clock, and madame's chocolate, then—why does she not ring for it?"

"Madame is ready," called back Mathilde, "but I have the laces all spread on the floor. Achille will bring it up!"

Mrs. Delamere was sitting in her drawing-room, a book in her hand, and little Bijou sleeping in her lap, when the door swung noiselessly open on its hinges, and the little tray of chocolate, with its silver pot and painted cup of rare old transparent china was brought in.

"Put it on the table, Achille," she said, without looking up.

The tray was deposited on the little round stand, draped

with an embroidered cloth, which stood near her, and still the man stood beside it, as if awaiting further orders.

"I want nothing more," she said, looking up, "and—"

It was Giuseppe, instead of Achille, who had brought in her cup of chocolate, and now stood bowing obsequiously before her.

"Madame will pardon me—but I was coming up, and the faithful Achille, learning that I had business with madame, allowed me the pleasure of carrying the tray of chocolate."

Ida leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes with an expression of resignation. The man was obnoxious to her, but he must be tolerated.

"Well, Giuseppe, what is it?"

"I have not yet condoled with madame in her great, her irreparable loss!"

"Was that what you wanted to say?"

"Not entirely, madame. I have learned that madame contemplates going abroad?"

"You have heard aright."

"For an indefinite period of time?"

"Yes."

"And—did madame bethink herself of the poor Giuseppe?"

"I was compelled to think of you, Giuseppe," said Ida, with a languid light of scorn in her eyes, "although you are not a pleasant subject of reflection. I should have left orders with my bankers to credit you to any reasonable sum—mind, Giuseppe, reasonable—for which you might draw upon them."

"Madame is all kindness," said the Italian, depressing his shoulders, as if quite borne down by the weight of her generosity. "But I have another plan to propose."

"Another plan, Giuseppe?"

"If madame will not be angry." The man seemed, in his quick, wily motions, to deprecate her wrath. "Madame will need the services of a courier—one who is experienced, active, and devoted to madame's comfort. Behold in me the man!"

He laid his hand on his breast, with a low bow.

But there was very little encouragement for him in Ida's contracted brows.

"I have already Achille."

"Pouf!" Giuseppe made a little sound as if he were blowing away a thistledown. "Achille is well in his way, but he has never been outside of Paris. He has no experience—no versatility. Achille speaks but one language, his native French. As for me, I am a cosmopolitan. It will be for madame's best interests to allow me to accompany her as courier."

Ida's heart sunk within her at the idea of this man's dogging her, like a shadow, everywhere.

"Giuseppe," she said, irritably, "I do not want you."

"Madame will never persist in such cruelty," said the Italian, smirkingly.

"And I will not take you in my suite," she added, in a tone of resolution.

"But look you, madame"—Giuseppe advanced close to her on tiptoe and lowered his voice to an accent that was almost a whisper—"the world is divided into friends or enemies. One who is with you constantly, whose actions are subject to your scrutiny, who is devoted to your welfare—think, madame, is it not safer?"

The sudden blood mounted to Ida's cheek. Did the man mean to threaten her? And yet her courage failed utterly at the remembrance of how completely she was in his power. Yes, she must comply with his insolent requisitions; there was no other course left open to her. And, after all, second thoughts proved conclusively to her that the man was right. It would be safer to have him always under her own eye. He might threaten and tyrannize over her—she must take the risk of that—but he could not very well play her false.

"Giuseppe," she said, after a few minutes of reflection, "your plan has its advantages. I will take you into my service."

The Italian bowed in a servile fashion; his eyes shone with subdued, triumphant light.

"Madame will have no reason to regret the course she has adopted," he said.

"We will start the day after to-morrow," added Ida, quietly; "you may hold yourself in readiness on that morning. Until then I have no orders for you."

Giuseppe again inclined his head and withdrew. He had conquered, yet he could not but respect the spirit and resolution of his fair foe.

But Mrs. Delamere's chocolate, although made in Anastase's best style, was quite flavorless to her this morning.

"Am I always to be haunted, followed, made miserable by this man?" she muttered to herself as she paced up and down her room, her crapes and bombazines rustling around her as she walked. "Oh, if he too could be stricken out of my path!"

And then she stopped short, with a paling cheek and a momentary horror and distrust of herself. What dreadful possibility had been shaping itself in her mind?

What had Giuseppe once told her was the armorial motto of the L'Echelles?—"Vengeance to the death." And she was —was she not?—a daughter of the L'Echelles?

Ida sat down shuddering. Until this moment she had never doubted herself.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BEECHCLIFF.

Our story, bridging with a single stroke of the pen all those revolving days and months which humankind are compelled to live through, mercilessly and monotonously passes over a hiatus of seven years.

Seven years! There is much of incident and transformation in seven years; but when they are closed over it is but the page of a volume turned and forgotten. So let them be as far as Ida Delamere's life is concerned.

It was sunset at Deepdale Rectory once more, and the murmurs of the Connecticut River were filling the air with music as of old. The honeysuckle on the porch now, covered with the spicy sprays of blossoms, was, perhaps, a little denser in its green moving drapery. The apple-trees at the back door had grown older and more gnarled and spreading, while the lame puppy that had been the fostered darling of little Ida Chaloner's girlhood had grown to a belligerent-looking dog with the least perceptible hobble in his dignified gait, and was now sunning himself on the door-mat, reflectively snapping at the flies as he lay extended at full length.

Otherwise the rectory seemed but little changed; nor had Mr. and Mrs. Gresham, enjoying the cooler air that accompanied the June sunset, upon the porch, altered greatly in the years that had elapsed since Rex Delamere and the giddy, beautiful child of their adoption electrified them with their stolen marriage. The good clergyman had looked old at thirty-five; at forty-eight, age seemed to have acquired no more marked advantage over him, while Mrs. Gresham, plump and fair-faced as ever, had actually appeared to grow younger.

Mr. Gresham took no more pupils now. Eleanor was happily married to Geoffrey Moreland, who had completely forgotten that he had ever been madly in love with the black-eyed little playmate of his youth. Monty was in business in a neighboring town, and James and Angie were the only olive-branches left at the paternal hearthstone.

In a moderate sort of way, Mr. Gresham was independent

now. His tastes, and those of his family, were inexpensive and frugal, and he could afford to live at his ease.

The rector had been reading, while his wife sat knitting silently by his side. Presently he closed the book, and taking off his spectacles, deposited them slowly in their case, and put the case into its place in his left hand waistcoat pocket.

"My dear," said the Reverend Mr. Gresham, "isn't it about time for the children to be home?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Gresham, mechanically glancing at the length of the shadows on the door-yard grass, "I should think it was."

"I don't quite realize all this as yet, Selina," said the rector. "I dare say I shall in time. It seems so strange, you know, when one comes to think of it, that Ida is coming back again. Why, it's nearly eight years since we have seen the child!"

"Nearly," assented his wife.

"She'll be changed, of course?"

"Oh, certainly, she'll be changed! Let me see—she can't be far from twenty-four years old now; she was considerably younger than our Eleanor, you know."

"It was a curious freak of hers, the buying of the old Beechcliff estate up the river," went on the Reverend Mr. Gresham, "and yet there's something touching in the idea of her wanting to be us near again. Ida was always an affectionate little creature."

"It is not every one who can afford to indulge in such expensive freaks," said Mrs. Gresham, who had not yet forgotten her way of looking at the common-sense aspect of affairs. "Forty thousand dollars! and they tell me she has spent at least half as much more in fitting it up and furnishing it!"

"And not to tell us until just as she was coming to take possession for the summer, too," added Mr. Gresham, smiling, as he slowly patted the lame dog's head. "She wanted to surprise us; well, well, she's had her wish. Everybody was wondering who had bought the Beechcliff place, and they wondered more and more when the landscape gardeners, and the architects, and the upholsterers swarmed over it. I remember asking Squire Denholm about it, and he told me it had been bought by a lady from abroad; dear me, I never once dreamed of its being our Ida!"

"I suppose she will live in the city during the winter months," said Mrs. Gresham.

"Most probably," said the rector.

"Hush! didn't I hear the children's voices? Yes, here comes Angie now!"

Angeline Gresham, a tall girl of nearly seventeen, had not grown into any special beauty in the seven years that have lapsed since our readers parted from her; but she was a fair, fresh-faced blonde, with a profusion of shining flaxen hair, a coral-red mouth, and an innocent expression of face, which reminded one of a white kitten, or a cluster of forget-me-nots, or any other guileless, confiding thing. Jamie, her companion, was a stalwart young slip of eighteen or nineteen, just prepared for college; for it had been the one ambition of Mr. Gresham's life to see his youngest son a clergyman, like himself.

"Mamma," cried Angie, breathlessly, as of old, "it is the prettiest place!"

"How does it happen that you are so early?" interposed Mr. Gresham. "It is hardly ten minutes since I heard the whistle of the down train; and, good pedestrian though you are, you could hardly have walked the distance in ten minutes!"

"We did not, sir," said Jamie. "Squire Denholm's lumber wagon was coming this way, and they brought us as far as the bars of the squire's pasture-field."

"But about Beechcliff?" questioned Mrs. Gresham. "I want to hear about Ida's home."

"Oh, mamma, I never can tell you about it!" cried Angie, throwing herself on the porch-step at her mother's feet. "It is the grandest old stone mansion, with a row of white marble columns in front, like the picture of the Parthenon; and such a flight of marble steps, with vases of flowers taller than Jamie at their foot. And oh, mamma, don't you think, there was an open carriage, with blue velvet cushions, met us at the depot: and a driver with a black velvet band round his hat, and he said the housekeeper had sent him to meet the train, and Jamie and I drove up the avenue as fine as you please!"

"Which comes first—the marble columns or the blue velvet cushions?" said Mr. Gresham, with a puzzled face. "You are a little disconnected in your story, my dear."

"I can't help it, papa," said Angie, laughing. "I have to tell things just as I happen to think of them."

"Well, go on," said Mrs. Gresham, evidently much impressed by the driver with the black velvet band round his hat.

"Well, we walked all over the house, mamma. There are more rooms in it than you could count, such high ceilings, and the walls all paneled in white and dove-color and gold,

and great white staircases and niches all along the hall, filled with real marble statues, which came from Italy last week. So the housekeeper says. And the floors are all covered with velvet carpet. Oh, mamma, it was like stepping on the moss in the woods, one's feet sunk down so dead and still-like! And such curtains, mamma! The satin of your best dress is nothing to them; and tassels so heavy one can scarcely lift them; and gilded stands of flowers in all the windows, which are taken away as soon as they go out of bloom and replaced by others; and pictures—Jamie said they were very fine, but they looked too dark and dull for me. And a conservatory, mamma, that you enter by a little railed balcony from the drawing-rooms. I called them parlors, but Mrs. Hyde always said drawing-rooms. So, I suppose, that is the polite way of expressing it. Oh, that conservatory! It was like a temple of crystal, with a great dome over it, and there were trees of lemons and oranges, and a banana-tree in the center, with its top leaves brushing the glass, and acacias and passion-vines, and a little fountain hidden away so that you could only see the spray and hear the dripping sound! I stayed there till Jamie got really impatient."

"There's a deer park, father," struck in Jamie, waxing weary of his sister's details, "and you never saw grounds laid out finer than that fellow from Boston has arranged these. It's a complete succession of pretty surprises—one wild nook after another, and every one so perfectly developed. There were some capital ideas in rustic bridges—these, and the boat-house on the river, it was a picture in itself, with a flight of stone steps leading down to the water-side, with rails of twisted cedar, all covered with woodbine, that you would declare had been growing there for years. Oh, father, what a thing money is! There's Beechcliff, that has been going to ruin ever since old Commodore Caten died, and now it has been transformed into a perfect Eden by Ida Chaloner's money."

"Yes," said Mr. Gresham, quietly: "and, my son, we are enjoying it as much as she can do."

"I don't know about that," said Jamie, doubtfully.

"And"—went on Angie, feverishly anxious to get the floor again—"there's a long glass grapery, with grapes nearly ripe now—great clusters of white Frontignacs and black Hamburgs; and the flowers—oh! they are scattered wherever you look! I saw the croquet lawn, as smooth as a floor covered with green velvet, and Jamie said there was a billiard-room upstairs. I wish you could see Ida's own rooms, mamma—three of them. How do you suppose she occupies three rooms

at once? That's what I asked Mrs. Hyde, and she told me they were bedroom, sitting-room, and dressing-room."

"Mrs. Hyde thought Angie never would leave off asking questions," laughed Jamie, good-humoredly.

"I'm sure she thought me an ignorant little country girl; but, mamma, that's just what I am," admitted Angie, frankly.

"But you haven't told us yet when Ida is coming to inhabit this fairy realm of your description," said Mrs. Gresham.

"Mrs. Hyde don't know herself. Not until a week, she says, in any event. But the house is all ready."

"There are some very fine horses in the stables, sir," said Jamie. "One Arabian saddle horse, for Ida's own use, was brought from Paris."

"Do you suppose, my son, he will carry her any safer than your old Meg Merrilies jogs along with you?" pleasantly asked Mr. Gresham, detecting the subdued accent of discontent in his son's voice.

"Of course he won't," said Angie, decidedly. "But he is such a pretty creature, with great, soft eyes, like a gazelle's. And there are nine different sorts of carriages—high carriages, low carriages, and close coaches, and open phaetons, and one dear little low basket affair that Ida drives herself in. I dare say I shall have many a ride in that basket-carriage."

"If Mrs. Delamere chooses to take sufficient notice of little Angeline Gresham!" said Jamie, dryly.

"Jamie," cried Angie, turning round, her fair cheek dyed red, "as if I didn't know Ida better than that!"

"You have not seen her for seven years?"

"If it were seventeen years it wouldn't make any difference in Ida."

"Angie is right," said Mr. Gresham. "Come, Jamie, I left the cauliflower plants for you to water—it's time they were attended to!"

Cauliflower plants! Jamie Gresham thought of the gentlemanly gardener at Beechcliff, with his three underlings, with a mental sigh; but he was a brave fellow, and he went whistling off to draw the water for the thirsty plants.

"You are to go to-morrow, mamma," said Angie, pulling the dog's big, flapping ears, "you and papa. Mrs. Hyde says the carriage will be at the ten-o'clock train, and she particularly wishes you to see to the arrangements she has made about the house."

"Mrs. Hyde is no doubt a very sensible woman," said Mrs.

Gresham, rather gratified at being thus personally appealed to. "I should like to go very much."

"Papa," said Angie, "what do you say?"

"That generally I don't care much for these grand houses, daughter," answered the clergyman, placidly, "but that I have considerable interest in the gilded cage which is to belong to my little wild-bird Ida. Yes, Selina, we will go!"

The Rector of Deepdale was as much pleased, in his quiet way, with the new arrangements at Beechcliff as his enthusiastic young daughter had been.

It was not only a majestic old mansion, overlooking the blue, serene windings of the Connecticut River, but it was a domain enriched by the choicest inspirations of landscape gardening. The grand elms and beeches whose green plumy branches overshadowed the lawn, had been left undisturbed—the tiny cascades, leaping down the wooded cliffs, had been spanned by rustic bridges which partook of the wild nature of the scenery around them, and in every cool, shady nook, where you felt inclined to stop and survey the richness of the June landscape, there was a seat of intertwined wood-work, or slender iron, as if placed there expressly for your convenience at the special moment. The shy, dappled deer, grazing on the velvet slopes that extended up to the green walls of woodland, eyed the good clergyman from behind the almost invisible net-work of wire that separated their domains from the pleasure grounds—a peacock, purple-crested and gorgeous, was spreading his Argus-eyed train on the marble balustrade of the wall that ran in front of the portico steps, and a cluster of white marble sea nymphs, standing with clasped arms in the center of the green lawn, were merely hidden by the spray-like twinkle of the diamond drops which fell in musical rain from the inverted chalices held high above their heads into a shallow marble basin, whose rim was hidden by the glossy leaves and purple blossoms—clusters of the tropical-looking hydrangea. Mr. Gresham drew a long breath.

"There is a use in the beautiful," he said, looking mildly around on the scene of sylvan beauty. "Yes, yes, Jamie was right when he thought money could accomplish marvels. And that striped awning which I can just see through the tops of the trees down by the river edge, I suppose belongs to the boat-house. There's something Venetian about that, my dear!"

"Yes, to be sure," said Mrs. Gresham, not thinking about the awning, but intent on the purple blossoms of the hydrangeas which she was comparing, mentally, to a stunted

specimen she had at home in a green-painted tub, which had once held butter. "I am sure nobody can take more pains with a hydrangea than I have done with mine, but just look at the difference!"

"Suppose we go in and inspect the library, my dear," said Mr. Gresham. "Ida used not to care much about books, but she shows very good taste in being aware that a well-furnished library is quite as necessary to a house as a well-furnished dining-room; Jamie tells me there are some very fine English editions of the standard authors, and several portfolios of the very choicest proof engravings."

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Gresham; "and while you are looking at the books, I'll just see how Mrs. Hyde has managed with the china-closets and linen-room."

Mr. Gresham, stumbling through the wide hall, in his blind, near-sighted way, after his wife had left him to pursue her own investigation, came face to face with a tall, softly stepping personage in black. He stepped aside with a bow. It might be the gentleman from Boston, who had charged so enormous a price for planning the landscape effects of the grounds, or it might be the New York architect, come to take a last look at the improvements that were finally complete. Mr. Gresham knew neither of these persons; but as he stood opposite the door-way, where a flood of western light poured upon the strongly marked features of the stranger, it seemed to him that he *did* know this man.

"Why, it can't be possible! yes, it can," he said, growing more bewildered and more certain every moment. "It's that Italian fellow—the murder at the Hollisforde Hotel, twelve or thirteen years ago—it's Giuseppe!"

Giuseppe it was, who was now bowing low.

"I hope I see Mr. Gresham well," he said, in accents that bore the unmistakable stamp of foreign birth.

"Yes, thank you; quite well," stammered Mr. Gresham. "But how on earth did you come here?"

"I have the honor to be in Mrs. Delamere's service at present, sir. I officiated as her courier while she was abroad, and I am now here superintending the last preparations for her arrival. In what can I be of use to monsieur?"

"Nothing, thanks; I was only going to the library!"

"The library is to the left, sir," and, officiously preceding Mr. Gresham, Giuseppe threw open the arched door and stepped back with a bow.

"A very polite person," thought the good clergyman, a little uneasily, as he fitted on his spectacles, "but a most dis-

agreeable face, if one were to judge solely by externals. A sort of major-domo, I suppose; no doubt a useful appendage to such a large establishment as this; but I can't say I admire Ida's taste in servants."

Squire Denholm's lumber wagon did not happen to be at the depot this time, and so the Reverend Mr. Gresham and his wife had to walk the weary distance between Deepdale Station and the rectory; consequently it was nearly dusk before they reached their quiet little home.

"Angie has got company," said Mrs. Gresham, as, at the foot of the garden, she looked up and saw the uncertain glimmer of a white dress in the door-way beside Angie's pink cambric. "I dare say Minnie Waller has come to pass the evening with her."

"Yes," said the rector; "but it is too damp for them now. The evening air blows cool. Children," he cried, raising his voice to reach their ears, "it is getting too late to sit out there."

"Only five minutes longer, Mr. Gresham," pleaded a soft voice in the well-known formula of answer so familiar years ago.

The rector came to a dead stand-still, and fumbled nervously for his spectacle-case. Mrs. Gresham gave a little shriek, and sprung forward.

"Father, don't you know the voice?—it's our Ida!"

And the next instant, before the good clergyman knew whether he was awake or dreaming, the clinging arms were around his neck as of old.

"Yes," said Mr. Gresham, trying to swallow the lump that would keep rising in his throat, "it's our Ida. I should know that squeeze round my throat anywhere. God bless you, child! and God be thanked for bringing you safe back to us!"

And then the rector wiped his eyes, thankful for the friendly dusk that hid his features.

"Let us have the candles lighted," said Mrs. Gresham; "and then we can look at the child's face."

For Ida was a child to them, now, just as she had always been.

"I am not going to Beechcliff to-night," said Ida, when she had been kissed, and questioned, and hugged over and over again. "I am going to sleep upstairs in the little bedroom, with Angie; it will seem like old times again."

Old times! As if they could ever return in their first freshness!

CHAPTER XXIX.

PLAYING CROQUET.

THE old stone mansion at Beechcliff was full of company all those lovely summer months. The croquet lawn glittered with bright dresses; the wide old halls and staircases echoed to the sound of gay voices, and the sober, steady-going old denizens of Deepdale opened their eyes wide at the stories of the city people, and their splendid fashion of doing things, which were extant through the neighborhood. This sort of life was that which best suited Mrs. Delamere. She liked society; she delighted in surrounding herself with an atmosphere of congenial gayety and brightness. She herself was the blithest spirit, the sunniest and most merry of the party; and, to see her in the bright domain of her own home, no one would ever have suspected the existence of the one dark shadow of her life —the Nemesis that brooded continually at her hearth-stone, poisoning her gayer hours, and lurking like a dark, bitter drop in the sparkling chalice of her daily life, in the shape of Giuseppe Antonardi.

Yet the old housekeeper at Beechcliff thought that Mr. Giuseppe was certainly the most useful attendant, the most gentlemanly person that ever condescended to read the newspaper in her special sitting-room, and to entertain her with his amusing and instructive conversation. And then, too, he was so considerate of the other servants—so little disposed to take advantage of his position as Mrs. Delamere's confidential major-domo and chief adviser in charge of the household. If Mrs. Hyde had been ten years younger she certainly would have lost her heart to Mr. Giuseppe. As it was, she mingled her admiration with a spice of semi-maternal kindness, which took a definite shape in hot cups of coffee at all sorts of unnatural hours, the easiest chair in the sanctum she called her own, and the choicest morsels at table.

"Mr. Giuseppe has seen better days," she would tell the other servants, reprovingly, when any of them, driven to desperate measures by her glaring partiality, would venture to utter a remonstrance. "He is not an ordinary lackey. I don't assert the fact for certain—I have no authority to do so —but it is my private opinion that Mr. Giuseppe is an exiled Italian nobleman, banished from his country for noble republican opinions, and compelled to seek an honest livelihood in a way little suited to the manner of his birth."

"Fudge!" observed Perkins, the coachman. "A nobleman, indeed! I guess I am just about as much of a nobleman as he is! But these foreign fellows always turn the women's heads."

It was a bright evening in July, just after sunset, and the company at Beechcliff, with one or two exceptions, was assembled on the croquet-ground. This Beechcliff croquet ground was, in its way, the prettiest spot in all the domains—a smooth lawn, kept like shorn velvet by the scythe and roller, the western or lower end walled in by a dense hedge of laurel, the eastern bounded by a high, sloping terrace, divided in the center by a flight of half a dozen marble steps, crowned on either side by shallow marble urns or vases, from which fell long, swinging trails of ivy and periwinkle, and white and purple masses of blossoming petunias. On the other two sides, trees and shrubbery formed natural partitions, so that the croquet players at Beechcliff found themselves, as it were, in a cup or dell of greenery and brightness. At this hour, with the gold of the summer evening yet filling all the west where the sun had just gone down, and the atmosphere, heavy with the fragrance wafted from the neighboring rose-gardens and flower *parterres*, it seemed like a picture by Watteau; the guests scattered here and there, some playing with real excitement and genuine interest in the game, others using ball and mallet, as a cover for sly flirtations or open badinage, the bright fluttering of diaphanous summer dresses, the glitter of jewels, and the glow of ribbons, the chime of voices and laughter, and the click of the painted spheres of wood, one against the other, while the hostess, sitting on a chair of light iron-work, painted to imitate mossy branches of twisted wood, near the foot of the terrace steps, looked on, smiling and amused at the festive scene which surrounded her.

Ida Delamere, at twenty-three, was different from the Ida Delamere of sixteen—yet essentially the same. She had been a rosebud then—she was a queenly rose, in its fullest, most royal blossoming now. Her skin, smooth and pink-tinted as a waxen japonica, yet retained the dazzling bloom and fine-grained freshness of early youth; her hair, no longer hanging in loose masses of ebon curls over her shoulders, was coiled in a heavy purple black rope round the back of her head, and confined there with a coral comb, sweeping away from her low, broad forehead in a rippling line; but the soft, languid eyes, with their heavy lids and long, curled lashes, and the full, strawberry-red lips, were the same as seven years ago. Ida had not changed — she had only matured. There was a

picturesque, unconscious grace in her attitude, as she sat there in a white grenadine dress, whose full, glistening folds lay round her on the grass, like fleecy ridges of vapor, and a scarf of the same material, bordered with narrow threads of gold-colored velvet, and a gold fringe was drawn loosely around her shoulders. Evidently she retained her old taste for color and sparkle, for long drops of coral were pendant from her delicate ears, and her Valenciennes collar was fastened by a coral brooch of exquisite tint and workmanship, while her slender wrists were encircled by coral serpents with glittering diamond eyes. A bouquet of pale-green mignonette was fastened in her belt, diffusing a faint breath of fragrance every time she turned or moved, and one hand, loaded with rich rings, whose glimmer made tiny party-colored rainbows with the restless play of the slender fingers, was touching the fair hair of Angie Gresham, who sat on the grass at her feet.

Angie looked very sweet and girlish in her plain blue muslin dress, without an ornament except the agate brooch which had been her mother's a quarter of a century ago, and the blue ribbon which knotted back her bright flaxen hair. For Angie was only a country rector's daughter, and was necessitated to do and dress accordingly, and Mrs. Gresham had very sensibly negatived the wishes of Ida to load Angie with dresses and jewels such as she herself wore.

"No," Mrs. Gresham had said, with that resolute little shake of the head, from which Ida, taught by old experience, knew that there was no appeal. "I've no objection to Angie's staying at Beechcliff a little, now and then; it will be a pleasant change for the child, and she sees very little society here; but she must stay as plain Angie Gresham, not as a doll for you to dress up and play with. Now, don't look grieved, Ida; your own common sense must tell you that I am right. It can't last forever; she is not the lady of Beechcliff, with half a million of dollars at her disposal, and it would be cruel kindness to turn her head just for these few weeks of gayety and pleasure. She may stay with you as much as you please, but she must never forget that she is Angie Gresham."

And to these terms, ruthlessly dictated by the wise little monarch-regnant of Deepdale Rectory, Ida was compelled to submit.

To Angie, however, it made little difference whether it was blue muslin or priceless brocade that she wore. Youth, health, and freshness were quite sufficient accessories; and to Angie it seemed that the life she was leading now, with its

happy indifference to expense, its constant change and variety, was a glimpse out of Eden.

She was leaning her head against Ida's knee, idly tapping the grass with the handle of her mallet, and looking straight into Mrs. Delamere's eyes just at that instant.

"No, Ida," she said, gravely, "it is not a fancy. You are not quite happy."

"Who among us is, child?" said Ida, laughing. "Where would be the use of a heaven if earth hadn't its shadows?"

"But your earth, Ida—what shadows can it have?"

"The roc's egg," said Ida, listlessly. "Don't you remember in the fairy story, Angie, that Eastern damsel who, in the midst of all her splendors, couldn't be contented without a roc's egg to hang from the dome of her palace roof. You don't know, child, what a tremendous shadow it can cast!—not the roc's egg, but its absence."

"But that is all nonsense, Ida."

"Is it? Now, I flattered myself I was talking remarkably good sense!"

Angie softly imprisoned Ida's hand in hers and patted it as she talked.

"It would have been so different if Rex had lived. Would you have been happier then, Ida?"

"Happier when?" Ida had been watching a brilliant carom run made by Miss Victoria Lyndhurst, a New York belle, and had lost Angie's words. "Two arches and the stake—that was capital!"

"I mean, Ida, happier, if Rex had lived!"

"If!" repeated Ida, impatiently. "Oh, Angie, who can tell? Where is the use of questioning ourselves about what isn't, and can't be?"

For Ida dared not tell this pale, single-hearted young girl that she had been happier far as Rex's widow than she had ever been as his wife!

"Are you vexed with me, Ida?" penitently asked Angie.

"No, little goose, I'm not."

"And you're sure you are quite, quite happy?"

"Yes, quite. There, Angie, they're calling for you—it's your turn!"

And, amid a universal cry of "Orange! where's Orange?" Angie Gresham went forward with her orange-striped mallet carelessly poised in her left hand.

"Come, Miss Gresham," said Waverley Cleve, who was captain of the side on which Angie was enlisted, "we want

some brilliant playing to redeem our luck after the run Miss Lyndhurst has just made!"

"But I am such a wretched player!" said Angie, glancing apprehensively at Miss Lyndhurst, who, flushed and triumphant from her success, stood opposite, tapping the toe of her French slipper with the end of her mallet.

Miss Lyndhurst was a bold-looking, handsome girl, with red-gold hair, reddish-hazel eyes, and a great deal of color—whether artificial or real people differed in opinion—and her dress of embroidered India muslin, relieved by a broad fringed sash of violet silk, was splendid and expensive in the highest degree.

"It isn't always play; it's partly luck," said Mr. Cleve. "Come, Miss Gresham, do your best!"

"Aim a little more to the left," suggested Captain Gracie, a flaxen-haired young son of Mars, who was "on leave" from somewhere on the confines of Nevada, and was a guest at Beechcliff with his sister, Mrs. Henley Forsyth.

"A trifle squarer with the mallet," cried Mr. Forsyth, kneeling on one knee to adjust Angie's ball. "There, that's better. Don't be nervous now, Miss Angie."

Miss Lyndhurst colored, and her red-brown eyes took a redder sparkle. She liked to be queen in her circle, wherever it was, and Angie Gresham was attracting altogether too much attention to be agreeable to her.

"Perhaps, Captain Gracie, you will kindly allow Miss Gresham to play, unless you mean the game to last until midnight. There is no moon, and we can hardly expect Mrs. Delamere to illuminate the croquet ground for our behalf!"

"Croquet by starlight isn't bad if you have the right kind of partner," said Mr. Cleve, with an admiring glance at Angie, which was gall and wormwood to the New York belle.

"There are a lot of colored Chinese lanterns about the house somewhere," said Ida. "I dare say, if Victoria wishes, we could illuminate the ground very prettily."

"Dear Mrs. Delamere," cried Victoria, turning with her sweetest smile, "living at Beechcliff is like being the possessor of Aladdin's lamp. There's absolutely nothing which you can not do!"

Ida elevated her eyebrows slightly. Miss Lyndhurst was almost too demonstrative to suit her taste; and in the same instant Angie struck the orange-banded ball. It followed the line of Miss Lyndhurst's, passing under two arches, and rolling up close to the black-striped ball which belonged to the New York beauty.

"Capital!" ejaculated Mr. Cleve. "Miss Lyndhurst is at your power, Miss Gresham! Better, even, than I expected! Croquet her off the ground at once—she's a dangerous opponent!"

Angie advanced with brightened eyes and heightening color to take the advantage she believed herself to have gained; but Miss Lyndhurst stepped forward with curious promptitude.

"Stop, if you please, Miss Gresham," she said, even while Angie's foot was on the ball; "that wasn't a croquet!"

"Not a croquet!" cried Captain Gracie. "By the 'Newport Manual,' and Captain Mayne Reid's method, but it *was!*"

"I think it was," said Angie, timidly.

"It was not," repeated Victoria, with calm insolence.

"But I heard the click," interposed Mr. Forsyth.

"Of course," said Victoria, bitterly, "the gentlemen will all swear that Miss Gresham is right—she seems to be a very popular personage here;" these last words spoken with a bitterness whose edge was not taken off by the little rippling "society" laugh that followed them. "But as I happen to be in full possession of my senses, I don't like to doubt their evidence!"

"How is it, Mr. Lyndhurst?" demanded Cleve, flushed and eager, of the umpire; "is the croquet ruled out?"

Mr. Lyndhurst, uncle to the fair Victoria, and not a little in awe of her, looked puzzled.

"What does the captain of the other side say?"

Mr. Carisforde, a Bridgeport banker, pulled his mustache reflectively. As captain of Miss Lyndhurst's party, he felt himself bound to support her side, and yet he actually believed Angie to be right.

"I leave it entirely to the umpire," he said, that being the simplest way out of the perplexity which presented itself to him.

"Well—I don't know—it's a mooted question," hesitated the umpire. "You're quite sure about it, Victoria?"

"There isn't the shadow of a doubt on the subject, uncle!"

"I heard the click myself!" persisted Mr. Forsyth.

"I'm quite sure the balls hit!" interposed Angie, forgetting her timidity in the interest of the point.

"And I'm quite sure they didn't," said Miss Lyndhurst, sharply. "I played croquet all last season at Newport, and I think I ought to know!"

"It isn't a question of experience," said Captain Gracie, "it's a matter of plain truth and common sense. Mrs. Dela-

mere, you were looking on all the time—you ought to know. Why don't you volunteer an opinion?"

"Nobody has asked me yet," said Ida, laughing. "Yes; of course I saw it all!"

"And what do you say?" asked Mrs. Forsyth, who was a pretty young bride in a lavender silk walking suit, and very big blue eyes, like painted china.

"Yes!" cried Victoria, smiling her prettiest smile at the hostess; "I'll be content to abide by what Mrs. Delamere says."

"The balls did hit," said Ida, quietly. "I as well as Mrs. Forsyth heard the click. Angie is entitled to her croquet!"

Miss Lyndhurst drew back, biting her lips, while the hazel eyes grew almost lurid in the suppressed light. Angie noted her look.

"But I'll waive the privilege, if Miss Lyndhurst wishes," she said, innocently, anxious to avert the coming storm.

"I beg your pardon," said Victoria, in cold, constrained accents. "On no account will I allow any such quixotic courtesy. Go on—let the game go on!"

"Certainly—by all means," said Captain Gracie. "I don't see why Miss Gresham should concede anything to the opposite party!"

Thus adjudged, Angie placed her ball beside that of Miss Lyndhurst, and put her slender foot on it—but she was nervous and excited, and her stroke was uncertain and misdirected. Victoria's ball rolled but a few feet off, and then came to a stand-still.

"There!" ejaculated Miss Lyndhurst, contemptuously, "you haven't gained such an advantage, after all!"

"I am glad of it," said Angie, impulsively. "I didn't want to take the croquet, but Mrs. Forsyth insisted."

"What magnanimity!" sneered Miss Lyndhurst. "It's a pity you allowed yourself to strike the ball at all!"

Mr. Carisforde's turn came next, and in the excitement of the evenly contested game, the little altercation between the rector's daughter and the New York belle was forgotten by all save one—Victoria Lyndhurst herself.

When the game was over, she stood chatting with Mrs. Forsyth, her pretty Spanish hat, with its fall of snowy lace drooping over her forehead, but she was not looking at the bride—she was covertly watching Waverley Cleve who, with Angie Gresham on his arm, was slowly taking his way in the direction of the rose gardens.

Waverley Cleve was a good-looking man—more than this,

he was a rich man, and a rising man in the world of politics. Victoria Lyndhurst had had her eye upon him for the last two years, and she had plotted and maneuvered to secure an invitation to Beechcliff because Mr. Cleve was to spend the month of August in its cool shades.

"In a country house I can easily secure him," thought the experienced young lady of half a dozen metropolitan seasons.

But either the fish was shy, and would not rise to the bait, or Victoria had lost somewhat of her old skill in angling. Mr. Waverley Cleve flirted with her, rowed her on long boating excursions, played croquet, and practiced duets with all the docility and good humor in the world, but like the young man of the comic song, "he didn't propose."

"I see it now," thought Victoria, the lids half closed over the reddish-hazel eyes, as she stood apparently listening to Mrs. Henley Forsyth's description of the full-dress masquerade she had attended the week of her bridal, but in reality hearing not one word of it. "What a fool I have been not to understand it before—but I gave the man credit for having more common sense than to get entangled in the meshes of a little milk-and-water idiot like that tow-headed girl yonder. But I ought to have known that men are fools—of course she has made love to him, and he can't resist the temptation of a little flirtation when it comes directly in his way. Before she came to Beechcliff, I was his chosen companion—now I am neglected—thrown aside—left to find an escort for myself, and all for her sake! Well, *n'importe;* I believe I can afford to risk an even battle—let the country girl look out for herself. She shall find that it is not exactly a nice thing to cross Victoria Lyndhurst's path. Yes," she said, turning with a smile to Mrs. Forsyth, as that lady paused in her recital: "how nice it must have been! I do so delight in *bals masquerades.*"

Nor were Victoria's the only eyes which were on Angie as she sauntered through the wire gate-way which led to the rose gardens. Ida, from her position in the midst of a group of her guests, saw who the girl's companion was, and smiled to herself.

"Well, let them go," she thought. "I have suspected this growing fancy for some time. He is worthy of her, and she—it needs no second sight to see that she is fast falling under the enchantment of 'love's young dream!' Poor little Angie! I wonder how it seems to be really in love!"

Angie Gresham looked guiltily at the clock, as she entered the drawing-room that night.

"Past nine," she thought. "Who could have imagined it was so late? But they are all so busy talking over the garden-party that nobody saw me come in; that's one comfort."

Nobody saw her come in! Poor, unsophisticated Angie! as if a dozen pairs of eyes had not marked her entrance; first and keenest of which were the red-brown orbs of Victoria Lyndhurst, who was sitting in one of the bay-windows amusing herself by trying to flirt with Mr. Carisforde, who didn't understand the most elementary principles of that innocent little diversion.

"He's a dolt," thought Victoria, "but he's better than no one."

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. DUDLEY'S FRIEND.

"WHEN is Mr. Dudley coming?" asked Miss Victoria Lyndhurst of her hostess, as the ladies all sat in a certain large room, whose French casements opened on the lawn. All the ladies, and some of the gentlemen, for, as it was a rainy day, the others were dispersed in library, billiard-room and music-room, amusing themselves in a masculine manner. Miss Lyndhurst was embroidering on Java canvas; Angie Gresham was hemming a set of pocket-handkerchiefs for her father, and Mrs. Delamere, after her own indolent fashion, was reclining on a low sofa, looking very pretty, and doing nothing at all.

"Mr. Dudley?" said Ida, looking up from some sort of day-dream she was indulging in, semi-unconscious of the merry medley of voices around her.

"Yes; I do hope he will be here for our garden-party."

"I suppose he is coming to-day."

"To-day? Oh, that will be charming! He is the very companion for a rainy day in the country. When may we expect him?"

"I forget—if I ever knew," said Ida, laughing. "I gave his note to Giuseppe, and that is the end of it, so far as I am concerned. Giuseppe will see that it is all right."

"What a treasure that Italian courier of yours must be!" said Mrs. Forsyth. "He seems to assume every responsibility and see to everything."

"Yes," said Ida. But she did not apparently care to pursue the subject.

"Where did you come across him?" asked Miss Lyndhurst.

"In Paris," briefly answered Mrs. Delamere.

"When you were living there, directly after your marriage? Why, I thought he told my husband he had known you from a child."

"So he has," said Ida, vexed at feeling the hot blood glow to her forehead. "He was a servant in my uncle's service when I was a child.

"Your uncle, dear Mrs. Delamere?" echoed Mrs. Forsyth, who had rather a genius for asking questions. "I thought you had no relations living."

"I have none. My uncle has long been dead."

"What a loss that must have been!"

"No loss at all," said Ida, indifferently, as she rose and walked across the floor to the open piano, and slowly struck a few chords. "I cared very little for my uncle, and I believe he cared still less for me. Affection does not always run in the channels prescribed by blood, I believe."

Mrs. Forsyth, apparently not yet satisfied with the information she had gained, was just opening her pretty, inexpressive mouth for another question, when the door was thrown softly open by Giuseppe himself.

"Will madame please to receive Mr. Dudley? He arrived by the eight-forty train, and has just been breakfasting."

And, as Giuseppe bowed himself out of the room, Mr. Dudley entered it, a handsome, bright-looking man, of some two- or three-and-thirty, one of those easy, pleasant, conversational persons, who are sought for in every circle and seem to assimilate everywhere.

"Permit me to make my bow," he said, lightly, "and at the same time apologize for my neglect in postponing it for so long. But before breakfast I should not have had the audacity to present myself before so many beauties at once."

Mr. Dudley was at home immediately with all in the room, and had a pleasant word or an arch challenge of defiance for each and every one of them.

"But you have not told me yet why you did not keep your word, and come last week instead of this," said Mrs. Delamere, when, after making the circuit of the apartment, Mr. Dudley at length settled down on a chair close to the sofa.

"Have I had a chance?" demanded Mr. Dudley, with an injured countenance. "Or can you for a moment imagine that any but the best of reasons would keep me away from Beechcliff? By the way, while I think of it, let me congratulate you on your cook. I never in my life tasted such an omelet as was placed before me this morning, and as for the coffee, I assure you, upon my honor, it was as good as Del-

monico's! And that tall, foreign-voiced servant who waited on me—Giuseppe, I think they call him—he is the prince of serving-men!"

"Giuseppe is very attentive," said Ida, quietly. "I brought him with me from the Continent."

"One of your late husband's servants?"

"No." Ida bit her lips; would people never leave off asking questions about Giuseppe? "But I don't see, Mr. Dudley, what this has to do with your reason?"

"A very gentle hint to me to mind my own business." Ida could not but smile here at the correctness of his conjecture, though she made a slight disclaiming motion of her hand. "Well, but I really had a reason, and that reason is—a friend!"

"A friend?"

"The unexpected arrival of a friend from Scotland, the adopted son, or nephew, or something, of old Admiral Tyndale, of Glenholme. They were very attentive to me last year, when I was in Scotland; and the admiral is the soul of old-time hospitality; and as this gentleman is to be in America but a few weeks, I feel it to be my duty to devote myself entirely to his society. Nor will it be an irksome duty; he is a splendid fellow! And now you know my reasons for proving recreant to the marching orders I had received from Beechcliff, and my apologies for the necessity which I am under for returning to town to-morrow morning!"

"To-morrow morning!" was echoed in tones of deprecation and regret from various parts of the room; while Mrs. Delamere's voice, sounding soft and distinct through them all, asked:

"Is he pleasant, this Mr. Tyndale?"

"I beg your pardon—Dorrillon," corrected Mr. Dudley, who was whimsically busy in disentangling the knots his restless fingers had been tying in Miss Lyndhurst's zephyr wool. "Frederic Dorrillon? I should rather say so! The pleasantest fellow in the world!"

"Then," suggested Ida, laughing, "I can suggest a very simple road out of this labyrinth of perplexities and cross-purposes. You are to come to Beechcliff and bring your friend with you."

"May I?" in a tone of pleased animation.

"Haven't I just said it?"

"Then I shall go back by the evening train, and lose no time in taking advantage of your hospitality," exclaimed Mr. Dudley. "Seriously speaking, though, Mrs. Delamere, it

would give me great pleasure to open to my Scottish friend just such a glimpse of American country life as this. I wish his impressions of our western continent to be as favorable as possible."

"And we will all do our best to captivate him, if you will bring him here!" exclaimed Victoria Lyndhurst, clapping her hands.

"Take care!" cried Mr. Dudley. "Do you threaten chains?"

"Yes; but the chains shall be of gold, and light as gossamer," answered Victoria.

"I shall be sure to warn him beforehand," said Dudley, shaking his head solemnly. "It's all well enough for a desperate old bachelor like myself; but a sensitive young foreigner—"

"He is young, then?" questioned Victoria.

"Yes, and good-looking—just what you ladies would call 'splendid!'"

"And what is it we ladies would call 'splendid?'" demanded Miss Lyndhurst. "Come, I insist upon the details!"

"Well, he is very tall, and he is very dark, with a beard and mustache like floss silk."

"Black?"

"Yes; or so dark a brown that one would call them black; a bronzed complexion, and a pensive, piratical sort of air."

"Piratical!" repeated Mrs. Forsyth, with a little scream.

"Yes, like the Corsair, you know, or Edgar di Lammermoor, or Rochester in 'Jane Eyre;'—the sort of thing that goes down with women—grand, gloomy, and peculiar! Very accomplished, too; speaks all sorts of languages, and is particularly good company. Oh," added Mr. Dudley, with another shake of the head, "it's very disinterested of me to bring him here—he'll cut me out with everybody in the room!"

"At all events we shall give him the chance," said Mrs. Delamere. "When may we expect you both down here as regular sojourners?"

"Some time this week; that is, if he will consent to make a visit where he is unacquainted."

"But you must insist that he consent!"

"I'll do my best, Mrs. Delamere; and in the meantime who will join me in a game of billiards until time for the evening train?"

There was no lack of answers to this challenge, and present-

ly Mr. Dudley was engaged in a brisk game in the billiard-room, which was on another story.

"Miss Lyndhurst!" he cried, suddenly, "where are you going? Your turn is after mine."

"Excuse me just one moment," said Victoria, hurriedly. "I have dropped an ear-ring on the stairs, I think!"

"Allow me to go and look for it," said Captain Gracie, promptly advancing.

"Oh, no, not by any means. I'm pretty sure where I dropped it. I will not be an instant."

"Humph!" mused Dudley, as he went on with his play. "I saw her slip her ear-ring into her pocket half a minute ago, just after Waverley Cleve passed the door with that pretty girl in blue. It's Waverley Cleve she's going to look after, not the ear-ring. So she hasn't got over that infatuation about Waverley Cleve yet? Well, it's no business of mine!"

Mr. Dudley's legal mind had drawn the correct inferences. Miss Lyndhurst had gone to look after Waverley Cleve.

Crossing the wide, empty hall, with a step as light as that of a she-panther, Victoria Lyndhurst slowly entered the narrow corridor, which communicated with the side entrance to the conservatory, and standing quite still just within the tropical forest of plants, ferns, and blossoming vines which filled the glazed inclosure, she listened, the light in her eyes glowing as a coal-fire glows in the twilight—red and deep and flickering.

She listened; nor was it in vain, for Cleve's voice, low-pitched and gentle, fell on her ear in an instant. Evidently they were talking of some flower which they were examining.

"I don't know the generic name," said Angie, apparently answering his question. "I only know the emblem—love beyond the grave."

"Love beyond the grave," repeated Cleve, slowly. "Do you believe there is such a thing, Miss Gresham?"

"Of course I do." Angie's voice was full of surprise. ("Artful little minx," thought Victoria, setting her white teeth close together.) "Do you not believe it, Mr. Cleve?"

"I did not a month ago."

"But now?"

"Yes, I do now."

"And what has changed your opinion on the subject?" asked Angie, playfully.

"Can you ask me, Miss Gresham, when—"

He checked himself abruptly. There was a rustling among

the green thickets of equatorial bloom, and Victoria Lyndhurst stood smiling before them.

"Oh, I have run so fast!" she exclaimed. "Mr. Cleve, do come up to the billiard-room and help me play against Mr. Dudley. It's my turn now!"

Mr. Cleve's brow contracted.

"I am an amateur in billiards, Miss Lyndhurst."

"But you will come—unless"—and she turned toward Angie—"this young lady prefers a longer *tête-à-tête* with you!"

There was something in her tone which stung Angie's pride to the quick.

"No," she said, coloring crimson. "I have a letter to write yet before post-time. You will excuse me, Mr. Cleve."

And she slipped away through the drawing-room before a word of remonstrance could be spoken, while Victoria Lyndhurst drew Mr. Cleve triumphantly away.

"Just in time," she thought; "I have spoiled your prospects for once pretty effectually, Miss Angeline Gresham. There's nothing like being on the alert."

When she returned to the billiard-room, accompanied by her rather unwilling escort, Mr. Dudley was leaning against the window casing waiting for her to appear and claim her play.

"I am not to be taken at any unfair disadvantage now," she said, with affected artlessness. "Mr. Cleve is here to advise me!"

"So I perceive!" said Mr. Dudley, dryly. "Did you find the ear-ring?"

"The ear-ring?" Victoria, thrown off her guard for the moment, turned red, and uttered a little forced laugh. "No, I did not find it, but it don't matter."

"I think I know where it is," said Mr. Dudley, with a spice of malice. "If you will look in your pocket, you will find it exactly where you put it yourself five minutes ago!"

"Did I?" Victoria Lyndhurst's laugh was exceedingly hearty now, as it rang out at her own expense. "Good gracious! how absent-minded I am becoming! And to think what a search for it I had too!"

Mr. Dudley smiled; yet, as he encountered Victoria Lyndhurst's eyes, he could not but think that there was something dangerous in them.

"I had better have held my tongue," he thought; "but, nevertheless, there is a solid satisfaction in unmasking the

girl and allowing her to see that her little maneuvers do not blind *me!*"

Mr. Dudley returned to New York in the afternoon train, and Miss Lyndhurst was glad of it. She had a lurking consciousness that Mr. Dudley saw through her artifices, and Miss Victoria Lyndhurst did not like to be watched.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE NEW GUEST AT BEECHCLIFF.

It was toward six o'clock in the afternoon—the usual dinner hour at Beechcliff—and most of the guests were in their rooms, preparing to dress or dressing for that meal. Mrs. Delamere and Angie were on the lawn, where the white marble nymphs were shining through their sparkling veil of spray, and Captain Gracie sat on the portico steps, just returned from a walk.

"I saw the barouche at the station, with Perkins on guard, as I came by," he said, carelessly patting the dog's head as it crouched silently by his side.

"I suppose Giuseppe sent it to meet Mr. Dudley and his friend," said Ida.

"I am quite anxious to see this Chevalier Bayard of a friend," observed Angie.

"Come, this won't do," said Captain Gracie, merrily. "We who are garrisoning Beechcliff at present are not to be shelved in favor of a red-haired Scotchman, who is sixteenth cousin to Admiral Tyndale!"

"Red-haired!" echoed Angie, in horror. "Oh, Captain Gracie, Mr. Dudley said it was a beautiful silky black."

"My Dudley has a powerful imagination, and a way of putting things that would have made his fortune if he had been a romance-writer by profession," said Captain Gracie, gravely. "All Scotchmen are red-haired; for—halloo—"

He started to his feet and looked a little awkward as the inner door of the vestibule just above him was thrown open and Mr. Dudley emerged on the portico with the identical Scotchman in question by his side.

"This way, Dorrillon," he said. "The ladies are on the lawn, I perceive. Mrs. Delamere, let me introduce to you my friend, Mr. Dorillon—Miss Gresham, Captain Gracie."

Ida saw that the stranger was very tall and handsome, with dark, luxuriant hair and beard, and a mustache so heavy that it seemed completely to hide his mouth, except when he smiled or spoke sufficiently to reveal a set of dazzling white teeth.

There was something foreign in his air and manner as he stood there on the lawn—a something which you could not describe, and yet which was patent to all beholders.

And Mr. Dorillon—what did he think of the lovely young widow in the white dress, with fresh roses in her hair and at her belt, and rose-colored ribbons fluttering from her slender waist — the mistress of Beechcliff, and the most beautiful woman in the State? Beautiful with the dark, glowing loveliness that belongs not to America nor to England, but to the dazzling atmosphere and tropical clime of Italy—with creamy skin, and lips like scarlet velvet, and eyes where the light of southern skies seemed to burn in deepening, languid fire. It would be difficult—nay, impossible—to describe all the thoughts and impressions that surged through the mind of Frederic Dorillon at that instant, as he bowed, scarcely touching Mrs. Delamere's extended hand.

"You are welcome to Beechcliff, Mr. Dorillon," she said, smiling a cordial confirmation of her words.

"I am grateful for your welcome, Mrs. Delamere," he answered, in a voice that was low and deep, not without a certain musical accent in its tone.

"Captain Gracie was just giving us a description of Scotchmen," said Angie, mischievously, "when your sudden appearance on the scene interrupted it, Mr. Dudley."

"Of Scotchmen?" said Mr. Dorrillon, turning round, with an amused expression of countenance. "I am interested in that. Pray go on, Captain Gracie."

Captain Gracie looked inexpressibly sheepish.

"Oh, it was only a fancy sketch," he said, rather awkwardly. "I see now how utterly incorrect it was."

"Go on, Gracie; don't be bashful," said Mr. Dudley. "Let us have the benefit of it."

"Let us all go into the house," interrupted Ida, as Captain Gracie's eyes appealed mutely to her for assistance. "Giuseppe!" to the man who met them on the threshold. "We shall dine in about half an hour, Mr. Dorrillon," she added, as he slipped her arm through Angie's and entered the cool, darkened drawing-rooms.

"How do you like him, Angie?" she said, when they were alone together.

"He is very handsome—don't you think so?"

"Yes, but foreign-looking. He speaks with a slight accent, too. I don't like accents."

"I do," said Angie, thoughtfully. "At all events, I like Mr. Dorrillon."

"You mustn't fall in love with him, child," said Ida, laughing. "One at a time, Angie."

"I don't know what you mean, Ida," said Miss Gresham, coloring, and looking very much confused.

"I can tell you exactly what I mean," said Mrs. Delamere, "if—" She uttered a slight exclamation of surprise. As she turned toward the conservatory door she saw something flash and sparkle in the semi-darkness. It was the diamond cross on the bosom of Victoria Lyndhurst.

"Miss Lyndhurst! you here?"

"I was dressed too early for dinner," languidly explained Miss Lyndhurst; "so I lay down on the sofa, in this cool place, to wait for the gong. I declare I had quite fallen asleep. Did I startle you, Mrs. Delamere?"

Ida laughed. "Not so much as you have startled Angie. Why, how pale you look, and how your heart beats, little one!"

And no wonder! Angie Gresham was beginning to be actually afraid of Miss Victoria Lyndhurst.

"Little one!" slowly repeated Miss Lyndhurst. "You never call *me* 'little one,' Mrs. Delamere, and yet Miss Gresham is full eight inches taller than I. Am I not the more *petite* of the two? Why don't you call me 'little one?' the words sound so sweetly from your lips!"

"I don't know," said Ida, pondering the subject within her own mind. "You are so widely different! I should never dream of calling you 'little one,' yet the words come naturally to my lips when I speak to Angie!"

Victoria Lyndhurst laughed a little, well-pleased laugh. Yes, she was very different from the tall, sandy-haired daughter of the Rector of Deepdale. She felt that, as she rose from her sofa, and stood in front of the mirror that filled the chimney-piece from mantel to cornice, softly shaking out her draperies of pale-blue silk, and arranging the llama lace shawl gracefully over her shoulders, while her diamond ornaments scintillated vividly in the darkened room. As for poor Angie, her white dress was not a new one, and it had been washed and ironed many a time, and there was a mended spot, neatly executed, it is true, but still an undeniable mend, down by the hem, and her ribbons were rather a scant pattern. They *were* different. The dinner was formal and stately, as the dinners at Beechcliff generally were, with a glitter of cut-glass, pyramidal structures of flowers at either end of the table, and ceremonious courses following one another, according to Giuseppe's programme. But when the last perfumed

ices were sipped with tiny golden spoons, and the last glass of champagne was poured, and cup of black coffee swallowed, there was a universal adjournment toward the lawn and gardens.

Ida turned to Mr. Dorrillon.

"You are my latest guest," she said, with a child-like frankness of manner that was entirely devoid of anything like boldness; "and I shall devote the evening to showing you my domain of Beechcliff."

He offered her his arm with a grave smile. She glanced up into his face as she took it, with a momentary sensation that amounted almost to timidity—an unusual feeling on her part, and not a pleasant one.

"You have never visited this country before?"

He had dropped a pencil he was balancing between his fingers, and had to stoop for it.

"How clumsy of me!" he said. "But this pencil has been my companion through many a lonely hour. As you say, Mrs. Delamere, it is all new to me. Shall we go down by the shore of the river? Rivers are my special admiration."

"And you must tell me all about Scotland," said Ida, as she turned toward the path leading down the slope to where the blue gleams, flashing now and then through the trees, revealed the river's course.

"Have you never been in Scotland? I beg your pardon for the question, but I understood from my dear friend Dudley, that you had spent a good deal of time abroad?"

"I have, but not in Scotland. I have always been curious to see that land of old romance and story," she added, lightly. "Ah, you do not know what a fairy-world of beauty I have made it in my thoughts!"

"Then, perhaps, it is better you should never see it," Mr. Dorrillon answered, gravely. "This destroying of illusions is not pleasent."

"But they need not be destroyed."

"They always are."

"Do you mean in Scotland?" asked Ida, laughingly.

"No, not specially. I mean everywhere."

"I have not found it so," said Ida, unwilling to drift into a deeper current of meaning in her conversation with this stranger, yet unable to avoid it.

"You are a very fortunate person, Mrs. Delamere," he said.

"You speak as if your experience had been unfortunate," she hazarded.

"It has," was his low-spoken answer.

"Yet," pursued Ida, fascinated as it were into following up the subject, "it can not have been very wide—you are still young."

"I am not old, Mrs. Delamere; that is, if you count life by years."

"How else should I count it?"

"We sometimes number it by events—epochs—occurrences. But I am talking of the past, Mrs. Delamere," he added, "not the present. With me life ended long ago!"

She shivered instinctively, and then laughed.

"You will make me think I am walking beside a corpse."

He smiled gravely.

"That sounds metaphysical and German; yet there is more truth in these German legends than one is apt to give them credit for. Yes, as I told you, Mrs. Delamere, I have ceased actually to live. I am only existing now—waiting for the *finis.*"

Ida stole another timid glance at his face. He was beginning to interest her strangely.

"Mr. Dorrillon—pardon me if I seem curious, but it is not that—you speak as if you had met with some great grief."

"I have." He spoke through his set teeth, never looking into her pitying eyes. "A great grief—an overwhelming sorrow—one that I have closed the gates of memory on altogether. Mrs. Delamere"—in quite another tone—"this is the finest view I have ever seen, except one wooded slope on the banks of the Rhine."

"Yes," said Ida, thoughtfully, twisting the stem of the wild flower she held in her hand, but not thinking of the view. "Shall you remain in this country long, Mr. Dorrillon?"

"My plans are not yet fully determined."

"I hope we shall make it pleasant enough for you to decide to stay some time."

"Thank you," he said.

Ida was vexed with herself for having thus spoken. The sweet words, for which any other of her guests would have given all he possessed, had been received by this stranger coldly—as a matter of course. Ida determined that she would not again give Mr. Dorrillon reason to think she was interested, either one way or the other, in his stay or departure.

"Shall we return to the house?" she asked, abruptly.

"Are you tired of the moving shadows and the ripple of the water?" demanded Dorrillon.

"No; but they usually play croquet directly after dinner, and we have some excellent players in the house."

"You are fond of croquet?" he asked.

"Not particularly so," she replied.

"Nor I. I should rather remain here in the stillness and the solitude. Nature is the dearest and closest friend I shall ever possess."

He sat down at her feet, on a mossy bowlder, where an umbrella-like dogwood-tree laid its patch of tremulous shade on the turf. Ida was more annoyed than ever; his words puzzled her. She was accustomed to have her society courted and appreciated at its fullest value. This haughty, dark-faced Scotchman raved about solitude, and did not seem to care whether she stood beside him or not.

"Don't let me keep you here if you really prefer the gay group yonder," he said, suddenly looking up, as she hesitated. It was the one word needed to complete her half-formed resolution.

"No," she said, quietly, "I will not."

And, turning round, she went up the hill-side, her cheek crimson, and her pulses throbbing a trifle faster than usual.

"I have been very rude," she thought, penitently, as she paused at the crest of the elevation, and, glancing back, saw him still sitting motionless under the shadow of the dogwood-tree; "but I couldn't help it. I think I dislike that Mr. Dorrillon. No—I do not, either; but he puzzles me. I ought not to have left him there, but the impulse of defying him was too strong within me. If I were any one else, I should go back and ask his pardon; but of him—no, never!"

And, dismissing the idea from her brain, Mrs. Delamere went rapidly forward to the croquet ground.

"What have you done with Dorrillon?" gayly demanded Mr. Dudley, who was sitting on the grass at Mrs. Forsyth's feet, lazily enjoying the beauty of the evening.

"I have left him in the woods, rhapsodizing about nature," said Ida, smiling. "Am I too late for a mallet? Never mind; I will wait until the next game."

And, in watching the progress of the balls, Ida tried to forget Mr. Dorrillon altogether. But she was not altogether successful.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE INTERCEPTED LETTER.

"We are not playing as well as usual," said Mrs. Carisforde, when the game was about half through. "Our best players are gone. Where are Miss Lyndhurst and Mr. Cleve?"

"Victoria has a slight headache this evening, and thought she would not come out," apologized her uncle.

"And Cleve—where is he?"

"Writing in the library, I believe."

"Writing in the library! And on such a superb evening as this!" cried Captain Gracie. "Now, I call that downright sacrilege. Let some one go after him at once. Forsyth, you aren't in the game; go tell Cleve we can take in two more balls on our side if he will come. Stay—tell him Mrs. Delamere wants to speak to him."

Ida protested faintly against this lawless use of her name, but Mr. Forsyth was gone before she could check him, springing up the terrace steps three at a time.

Victoria Lyndhurst, sitting in the shadow of the drawing-room window-curtains, saw him enter, and her quick ears followed the ringing sound of his steps along the marble hall toward the library door. She was emphatically "on guard" that night, and neither sight nor sound escaped her vigilant senses. Rising softly, she stole through the drawing-room, entering a sort of boudoir which adjoined the library, and formed a communication between the two apartments. The door—a very unusual circumstance—was ajar; Miss Lyndhurst herself had opened it early in the afternoon, and had, either by accident or design, forgotten to close it again. There she paused, listening intently.

"It won't do, old fellow," she heard Forsyth say, resolutely. "The letters will keep, and croquet won't!"

"But you really must excuse me for to-night," said Waverley Cleve, in a tone of annoyance.

"You'll have to make your excuses to Mrs. Delamere then, not to me; it is she who has bidden your presence out on the croquet ground."

"Tell her how it is—that I am particularly engaged in writing."

"Not I; you must tell her yourself."

Cleve uttered an exclamation of vexation, but rose, nevertheless, pushing his papers under a crystal paper-weight, and Victoria could hear him striding out of the library after Mr. Forsyth.

This, then, was her opportunity.

Waiting cautiously until she was quite sure that the library was vacant, she stole into the room, and, creeping like a cat across the floor, she lifted the crystal paper-weight and hurriedly turned over the papers.

A low murmur of annoyance escaped from between her compressed lips—they were all blank sheets.

Yet there, upon the pen-rack which surrounded the silver standish, lay the pen, still wet with the ink in which it had been recently dipped. There had been no turning of the key in any desk—no slipping sound of drawers opening or closing. Of that Victoria Lyndhurst was quite sure.

"He can not have hidden it entirely," she said to herself, again turning over the papers. "I *will* know what it is!"

As her light, skillful fingers fluttered the papers one by one, a sheet of closely written note-paper fell between the pages of a quire of foolscap, bearing the well-known handwriting of Waverley Cleve. Victoria knew it by heart: she had treasured one or two notes he had sent her on trifling occasions too long and tenderly to be mistaken now; and a cold, hard smile of triumph came into her face.

"I thought so!" she muttered. "I thought so!"

Evidently Miss Lyndhurst was not troubled with any over-fastidious scruples on the subject of reading communications not intended for her own eye, for she devoured the first few lines with an eager glance:

"MY DEAREST ANGIE" (how her lip curled as she read the words!)—"Shall you be surprised that I take this method of communicating to you what I have already endeavored, without success, to tell you in words—my sincere and earnest love? But do not imagine that I shall press you with undue solicitations. You shall not even have the ungracious task of saying 'No!' If, when I meet you at the breakfast-table to-morrow morning, you come to me and place your hand in mine, I shall know that your heart goes with it; it is a common greeting at Beechcliff, and need excite no comment. But if you regard my devotion as uncalled for—if you wish to convince me as gently as possible that I have mistaken your kindness for something deeper—then, Angie, let the note be destroyed. I shall understand you without the mediation of words. I love you, Angie; I have been learning to love you ever since we first met at Beechcliff, and your fresh innocence, and pure, unsullied character taught me, in its contrast to the hackneyed affection of others" (here Victoria's lip curled again), "the beauty of genuine womanhood. And I am vain enough to believe that I can make you happy, my pure little wild flower. I have been all the afternoon writing this letter and rewriting it, and even now it is far enough from expressing all I would fain say to you, for—"

Here it broke off abruptly—here Henry Forsyth had burst into the room, checking the pen in its half-formed syllables. Miss Lyndhurst replaced it exactly where she had found it, between the sheets of foolscap, with the crystal paper-weight upon it, and crept noiselessly back to the boudoir just in time to avoid meeting Mr. Cleve, who was hastening back along the wide hall.

"So," she thought, "this is the engrossing task which has absorbed all his afternoon! And it has come to this! Really the man is blinder and more rash than I had supposed. Waverley Cleve actually proposing to a staring, pink-cheeked country girl, who has never even seen New York! Why, it's a complete infatuation! He will live one day to bless the hand that mercifully saves him from his doom, and that hand shall be mine!"

For Miss Lyndhurst had fully made up her mind, as she crept through the twilight of the parlors.

"I must watch," she thought, "and wait. Patience! My vigils have not been in vain hitherto. I shall win yet. Angie Gresham has no brains and I have, that is the difference between us, and I may safely defy her doll-face and simpering smiles!"

How little Waverley Cleve imagined, as he sat down at the library desk and resumed the penning of the epistle upon which so much depended, whose glance had rested, instinct with red-brown light, upon the pages destined for Angie's eyes alone!

Victoria Lyndhurst sat long and patiently, almost as motionless as a red Indian waiting in ambush for the rustling leaf or breaking branch that betokens the coming of a foe; nor was she unrewarded.

It was quite dark when she heard the library door close and Cleve's footsteps ringing along the floor of the hall.

The letter then was written—the letter which Victoria was fully determined Angie Gresham should never have, and she awaited calmly the development of the event.

Mr. Cleve turned at the carved black walnut newel and ascended the broad staircase.

It was quite dark now, and the halls were not yet lighted. Fortunately, Giuseppe was later than usual in this portion of his evening duty, and Victoria was quite certain of being unobserved as she hurried to the foot of the stairs and stood still there.

"Maria!" she could hear him speak to the chamber-maid who had charge of the rooms on the upper story.

"Yes, sir."

Maria was distributing clean towels, and had her arm full of scented white linen as she came to his summons.

"Will you do me a favor? Just lay this note on the dressing-table in Miss Gresham's room; or, stay—if you will show me which it is, I will put it there myself."

"Certainly, sir," said Maria, promptly; "it is the second door, sir—that one."

She held open the door, while Mr. Cleve, entering the sacred domain of maidenhood, where the twilight glimmered softly on snowy draperies, and the air was sweet with the breath of freshly gathered roses in a tall china vase on the mantel, laid the note reverently on the table.

"Remember, Maria," he said, slipping a piece of money into the smiling domestic's hand, "nobody is to have the note but Miss Gresham herself."

"I'll be sure to remember, sir," said Maria, dropping her best courtesy.

And then, with a heart as light as his footsteps, Waverley descended the stairs, whistling an opera air softly as he went, followed presently by Maria, who had completed her upstairs tasks.

Miss Lyndhurst had shrunk into the recess of the drawing-room door as they passed. She did not care to be observed just yet, and watched Maria on her way to the servants' hall, and Mr. Cleve as he went out into the dewy garden. Then, quick and silent as a flitting shadow, she glided up the stairway and into Angie Gresham's room.

There lay the tiny note, in whose folds dwelt so much of possible fate, shinining white in the gathering dusk, exactly where Waverley Cleve had placed it.

Victoria snatched it from the dressing-table, and tearing it into tiny pieces, thrust it into her pocket.

"I must burn the scraps when I get to my own room," she said to herself. "No word or line must remain to bear witness against me!"

Five minutes later, with a scented taper, ostensibly used to seal letters, burning in her room, Victoria Lyndhurst held over it the slips of paper one by one, watching the ashes curl into the little ash-shell of the taper-stand with a smile ten times more vindictive than any frown, and, finally removing her lace-edged pocket-handkerchief, she turned the pocket inside out, to make sure that she had destroyed them all.

Yes, all—all but one, which, lying amid the folds of her

handkerchief, had escaped her search, and which she now unconsciously returned to her pocket.

It is said that a murderer, seeking to avoid all taint of supposed crime, closes ninety-nine doors of suspicion, and leaves the hundredth wide open to convict himself. So it was with Victoria Lyndhurst. She outwitted herself!

When the party of croquet players came in, full of gay talk and laughter, Victoria sat at the grand piano in the brilliantly lighted drawing-room, striking such chords as she could improvise.

"Your headache is better, then, dear," said Mrs. Forsyth, in soft, congratulatory tones, as she advanced into the room.

"Oh, much better!" said Victoria. "It is so kind of you all to remember my trifling ailments. I have been asleep in my own room since dinner."

Angie Gresham had entered with Captain Gracie, and was sitting near the door. Victoria's eyes rested upon her with a calm, steady light.

"And you, Miss Angie—how have you enjoyed the game? As much as usual?"

"Very much," said Angie, shyly. Somehow she never felt entirely at her ease in Miss Lyndhurst's presence. "Is that nine o'clock?" as a time-piece in some adjoining room tolled the hour with musical click. "I had no idea it was so late. If you will excuse me, Ida, I will go up to my room. I promised papa to keep a diary regularly while I was here, and I have made no entries in two or three days."

"A diary!" repeated Victoria, mockingly, as with a smile and a nod from Ida the young girl withdrew. "Quite like the good young ladies in the story-books, upon my word! I did not know that anybody ever kept diaries nowadays!"

While Waverley Cleve watched her from the room with a deepening color on his cheek and a heart which throbbed perceptibly faster.

"She will get the letter now," he thought, "and my fate is coming nearer to me. Heaven grant that the little soft-voiced, blue-orbed dove may be willing to nestle to my breast!"

"Mrs. Delamere," called out Mr. Forsyth, who had been glancing over some letters brought him by a servant, "I have good news!"

Ida was sitting on a low garden-chair on the portico without, but so close to the window that the folds of her white dress lay partly on the carpet within the room, and her delicate profile was clearly outlined by the lamp-light, while Mr. Dorrillon, leaning against the casing opposite, talked to her in a

low voice. Evidently he had forgiven her her offense of a few hours ago.

She glanced up at Mr. Forsyth's voice.

"Good news—what is it?" she asked, with as much apparent interest as if Forsyth had not awkwardly interrupted her companion at a most absorbing point of description.

"Fairfax and his sister are coming to-morrow."

Ida's eyes sparkled.

"That is good news—very good news," she said, earnestly.

"Oh, I knew you would say so," said Mr. Forsyth. "Mrs. Delamere will have no more eyes for us, Mr. Dorrillon, when this good-looking rascal of a Fairfax is once here!"

Mr. Dorrillon glanced uneasily at Ida as the words were spoken. She felt herself coloring, and she could have bitten her scarlet under-lip through with vexation.

What was it to her whether Ferdinand Fairfax came to Beechcliff or remained in Boston? Why should she care whether Dorrillon thought she was overglad to welcome the new-comer or not? She was her own mistress, and accountable to none of them for her conduct, yet she was conscious of a very hearty wish that Henley Forsyth had been in Rome or Jericho, or any other place that was sufficiently distant from her drawing-room at that particular moment.

"What has detained them so long?" asked Ida, ignoring Mr. Forsyth's facetious allusions.

"Some friends who have just taken their departure, he says in his letter. We shall have Beechcliff full at this rate?"

"Yes, won't it be nice?" simpered his blue-eyed wife. "I don't know Miss Fairfax, but I've heard she's a very sweet girl!"

"Are they really such friends of yours?" asked Mr. Dorrillon, with a curiosity he had not yet deigned to display on any subject whatsoever.

"Yes, or else they would not have been invited to Beechcliff," answered Ida, calmly. "Miss Fairfax is one of the noblest girls I ever met. They were my fellow-passengers on the Liverpool steamer last spring, as well as old companions of travel before. You have met no Bostonians as yet, Mr. Dorrillon. I think you will like the Fairfaxes!"

And saying these words, Mrs. Delamere rose and joined a group of ladies near the piano, leaving Mr. Dorrillon for the second time that day to take care of himself.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

ANGIE GRESHAM did not begin to write as soon as she entered her room. She unbound the masses of flaxen hair from their fillet of blue ribbon, and exchanged her dress for a loose wrapper of white muslin, and then sat down to think.

The world had grown very different in Angie Gresham's innocent eyes since her last sojourn at Beechcliff. Somehow it had acquired more of sunshine and brightness. The quiet, every-day enjoyments were heightened into a radiant happiness, and Waverley Cleve was the magician whose presence had done it all. Angie knew it now, and felt it; there was no further disguising the facts.

Victoria Lyndhurst's sharp eyes had told her plainly enough what she might have been long enough in finding out for herself—that Waverley Cleve was not indifferent toward her—and that she loved Waverley Cleve!

"I know it's wrong," thought Angie, fluttering, as she sat at the open window, dreamingly watching the glow and quiver of the stars in the deep firmament above; "it must be wrong, for mamma told me I must never think about any gentleman until he had first asked me to be his wife. Mr. Cleve certainly hasn't asked me any such question," and Angie felt herself growing hot, even in the innocent companionship of the stars, "and yet I can't help thinking a great deal about Mr. Cleve."

Her reverie was here interrupted by a knock at the door, that made her start and color—but it was only Maria.

"I beg your pardon, miss, but I forgot whether I brought the towels to your room to-night. Bless me, are you sitting here all alone in the dark?"

"I—I haven't lighted a candle yet, Maria," faltered Angie, feeling as if Maria must know why she had preferred sitting in the dark. She sprung up, hurrying to strike a match and illuminate the room. "Yes—I believe the towels are all right."

"And," Maria glanced at the dressing-table and lowered her voice to a mysterious whisper, "you got the letter, miss, all right?"

"The letter, Maria?"

"Yes, miss—the letter; it was right on the table here."

Angie looked at Maria in surprise.

"I haven't seen any letter," she said. "What letter do you mean, Maria?"

"Well," cried the chamber-maid, "if that don't beat all. Why, I saw him put it here," touching the dressing-table with her fingers, "with my own eyes, and he says, says he, as pleasant like as can be, 'Remember, Maria, it's for Miss Gresham's own hand,' and there ain't a soul's crossed the threshold since; and what can have come of it?"

"Stop, Maria," said Angie, "you confuse me. Who put the letter here?"

"Mr. Cleve, to be sure, miss!"

"Mr. Cleve—and for me?"

"Yes, miss—for you!"

"But, Maria," said Angie, after a short silence of wondering surprise, "are you sure you were not mistaken?"

"Mistaken!" echoed Maria; "no more, miss, than I'm in saying that I'm standing here and talking to you this minute. Mistaken! of course not!"

"Then," said Angie, "what can have become of the letter?"

"That's the very question, miss!"

Maria got down on her knees to look under the table and on carpet—shook the dimity cover of the dressing-table to make sure that the letter had not hidden itself away there—and then subjected the rest of the room to a pretty diligent search.

"Well," said Maria, "now I am beat!"

"Maria," began Angie, with the instinct to rest upon some one else which seemed a part of her nature, "what do you think I had better do?"

"Well, miss, if I was in your place I would ask the young gentleman himself about it."

"Oh, Maria, no!"

"Why not? It's the only way to find out."

"No," persisted Angie, resolutely shaking her head; "that would never do. Wait, Maria; this mystery will be cleared up in time. The letter couldn't have vanished into nothing—it must be somewhere, and we shall find it after awhile."

Maria looked doubtful. But having a plan of her own, she said nothing more, and left Angie to wonder by herself.

"James," she said, presently, to a footman who was in the hall below, "would you be so kind as to go and ask Mr. Cleve for the key of his room? It's the towels, you know! Tell him it's Maria wants it!"

Maria was a plump, apple-cheeked girl, goodly to look upon, and not without a leaven of coquetry in her nature;

and James, being fully sensible of these feminine attractions, made a point of always doing whatever Maria asked him. Consequently, he entered the drawing-room and stepped quietly up to Mr. Cleve, who was dreaming over a portfolio of prints beneath the chandelier.

"If you please, sir," he said, in a low tone. "Maria wants the key of your room."

Cleve looked up in surprise.

"The key of my room? It is in the door. I never take it out."

"But Maria told me, sir—"

"Maria is mistaken."

James was just retreating in discomfiture, when Cleve, happening to look toward the door of the hall, saw Maria beckoning to him, and twisting her face into various contortions, which evidently had some special meaning.

"Stay, James," he said, "I will see Maria myself."

And he entered the hall, with Maria flitting before him to its furthest extremity.

"Well, Maria, what is it?" he asked.

"The letter, sir! Miss Gresham has never got it! It isn't there!"

Mr. Cleve stared at Maria a minute or two before he could fully comprehend her meaning.

"Not there!" he exclaimed, at last, as a glimpse of the real truth began to make its way through his brain. "Then what can have become of it?"

"That's the very thing, sir, as I told Miss Gresham over and over again. It can't have walked away itself!"

"You are sure it is not there?"

"Yes, sir, quite sure," reiterated Maria.

"Then some one must have taken it."

"But who could have taken it, sir?"

"I am sure I do not know."

Waverley Cleve's brow was knitted now, and his lips tightly compressed. Maria watched him, a little cowed, and thought to herself that she should not like to be an enemy of Mr. Cleve, or any one that he was very angry with.

"I am very much obliged to you, Maria, for telling me of this," he said, at length. "Miss Gresham does not know that you have informed me?"

"No, sir," said the girl; "I don't believe she would have allowed me to speak to you, sir, if I had let her know what was in my mind."

"Very well; say nothing to any person whatever on the

subject." He turned away, his brows still contracted, and Maria crept away to the servants' hall, thinking how very much all this was like the last dime novel that Perkins, the coachman, had lent her to read.

Waverley Cleve returned to the drawing-room, puzzled very much in his mind as to what all this might mean. There was some discordant element whose presence he had not suspected —some hidden interference which he must make it his business to track out as speedily and directly as possible. Surely it could not have been one of the servants who had taken away the note; and who else was there in the house capable of such perfidy?

As these half-formed thoughts ranged themselves in his mind, he chanced to look up, meeting, by this sudden movement, the full, stealthy light of Victoria Lyndhurst's peculiarly colored eyes.

She dropped her glance as their eyes met. He fancied she turned a shade rosier, but the room was warm and he might easily be mistaken. Yet that one glance had suggested a chain of associations to his mind. Victoria Lyndhurst—the girl who had always shown such a preference for his society—about whom people had rallied him time and again—whose dislike of Angie Gresham was so patent as to be almost rude—could it, he asked himself, be possible that—

In the same instant, Victoria, herself evidently a little embarrassed, drew her lace pocket-handkerchief out and passed it with a slight, nervous movement across her lips. As she did so a slip of paper fluttered from its web-like folds and fell on the carpet a little back of her.

Mr. Cleve rose, and advancing toward her, set his foot deliberately on the mute witness, screening it momentarily from view.

"Miss Lyndhurst," he said, trying to speak composedly, "you have not sung anything this evening. Sing the 'Spanish Muleteer;' it seems an age since I have heard it."

"An age since you have asked for it, you mean," said Victoria, seating herself at once at the piano. "You used to like to hear me sing, Mr. Cleve."

"Do I not now?"

He almost hated himself for his hypocrisy, as she shot a sidelong glance at him from her red-brown eyes.

"The songs of other birds have charmed you more of late," she said, opening her music-book, and interrupting all reply by the tumultuous chords she struck.

Miss Lyndhurst had a fine contralto voice, and really sung

very well, but the instant the music engrossed her attention, Waverley Cleve stepped back a pace or two, and letting his handkerchief fall, stooped to pick it up again, and with it the slip of paper.

Yes, there was no further possibility of mistake. It was covered with his own handwriting—a piece torn away from the very letter he had that afternoon written. With a heart swelling with indignation he read the words as they occurred irregularly:

"of words
—the wounds they
-love you, Angie. I have
—since we met
—nnocence."

That was all. Was it not enough? Yes—and more than enough. Victoria Lyndhurst's was the hand that would fain have upset the cup of his happiness and sweet Angie Gresham's. He shuddered to think how nearly successful she had been, and then he felt as if no punishment could be severe enough for the one who was so dishonorable and treacherous as this. Spare her? Not he! He would confront her with her own baseness—he would let her see that the full extent of her malicious guilt was discovered!

And all this time, while he stood, pale and rigid, with the slip of paper in his hand, Miss Lyndhurst was singing with all the pretty, graceful little turns of the head and trills of the rich, flexible voice that she could invent.

Cleve watched her with something very like disgust. How could he ever have fancied that this painted, affected old maid was beautiful?

"Are you satisfied now?" she asked, turning round playfully on the piano-stool, and looking him full in the face with a gaze that she had occasionally found not ineffective in former days.

"Yes, thank you," he said, calmly, "quite satisfied. There's something that you dropped from your pocket a few minutes ago, Miss Lyndhurst, when you took out your pocket-handkerchief."

He extended the bit of torn paper to her, enjoying the sudden change that came over Victoria's face—from artless surprise to quick recognition, then to blank, staring horror and guilt.

"It—it is not mine!" she faltered.

"No, it is not yours," he said, slowly, "and therefore it

was all the baser and more contemptible of you to steal it from her for whom it was intended and attempt to destroy it. For once, Victoria Lyndhurst, you are detected!"

Miss Lyndhurst was a strong girl, and a resolute one, who had never fainted in her life—but then she had never been in quite such a mortifying predicament before; and between her own shame, Mr. Cleve's blazing eyes, tight-lacing, and the heat of the evening, nature asserted itself for once.

Miss Lyndhurst fainted, falling off the piano-stool just as heavily as the girl she stigmatized as clumsy Angie Gresham might have done; Mrs. Henley Forsyth sprung to her aid at once.

"Dear me—she is fainting. A glass of water, Mr. Cleve, quick—and some cologne or hartshorn, somebody!"

A little crowd collected round Miss Lyndhurst at once, but Waverley Cleve walked calmly off, leaving somebody else to bring the glass of water. He had other business on hand.

"I knew she was tiring herself too much," said Mrs. Forsyth, sympathetically. "She has had a headache all the evening. Mr. Cleve ought to have known better than to have asked her to sing the 'Spanish Muleteer;' but men are so thoughtless; and dear Victoria is the most unselfish of human creatures!"

Miss Victoria, however, came duly to her senses, and was much relieved to find that Mr. Cleve was not among the little group that surrounded her.

"It is only faintness and the heat of the rooms," sighed Victoria, sweetly, in answer to the inquiries of Mrs. Delamere. "I am very foolish, to be sure, but I shall soon be better, if uncle will only give me his arm up to my room."

And so Miss Lyndhurst retreated from the field of battle.

Meanwhile, Mr. Cleve had gone straight to the library, and was once more seated before the desk, by the light of two large solar lamps, whose luster diffused a clear and delicious brilliance throughout the room.

"I will not give it up so," he muttered between his clinched teeth, as he drew a sheet of paper toward him, and dipped the pen once more into the silver standish.

Maria, according to orders, waited in the hall without, sitting very uncomfortably in a high Gothic chair, and falling asleep between whiles: for it was far later than Maria's usual hour for retiring, and she was a girl who liked her full quantum of sleep. Moreover, it was provoking that James shouldn't have known by intuition that she was there, and come to keep her awake by a little judicious flirtation. She

would tell James to-morrow, and then wouldn't he be sorry to know what an opportunity he had missed. She was turning these things over in the drowsy depths of her consciousness, when Mr. Cleve came to the door.

"Is the letter ready, sir?" asked Maria, starting at once to her feet.

"There it is. Give it into her own hands, Maria, and be sure you bring me back the answer yourself."

"Yes, sir. There sha'n't be any mistake this time."

And as Maria ascended the staircase, she examined the slip of crumpled paper Mr. Cleve had placed in her hand simultaneously with the letter.

"Bless me!" cried Maria, half aloud, "if it ain't a twenty-dollar bill! If he ain't the generousest gentleman in all the world. I'll have that new dress with the silk flouncings now, for certain!"

Angie Gresham was still sitting in her room before the unwritten pages of the diary which she had hardly the heart to commence when Maria tapped at the door.

"It's me, miss, with a letter!"

"Come in, Maria," said Angie, in surprise.

"I'm to wait outside, miss, for an answer," said Maria, demurely disappearing.

Angie opened the note with a little thrill at her innocent heart as she recognized Mr. Cleve's handwriting. It read:

"DEAREST ANGIE,—This is the second letter I have sent to your room to-night; so you will at least give me credit for being a tolerably persistent lover. The other was intercepted by an act of foul treachery, which I am resolved to anticipate for the future. Perhaps I might have waited until to-morrow morning before telling you how truly and earnestly I love you, and how entirely all the happiness of my future life will depend on your promising to become my wife; but I could not have slept with the question unanswered. If this communication seems abrupt, I can explain it all when we meet again. There is a time in a man's life when the impatience of an existence seems concentrated in one moment, and that time has arrived for me as I sit here waiting for your answer. One word will suffice for me, Angie—Yes or No. I await it as my doom. W. C."

Angie read the letter once, twice, three times. To her it was not abrupt; to her it bore the stamp of the genuine gold of lore—the gold which was to make her life's riches.

She sat down, and, with cheeks burning with soft, happy excitement, wrote upon a sheet of pink-waved paper the one little word, "Yes." It was fortunate that she had not to write more, for her hands trembled and her eyes were dimmed with a moisture which was not that of grief, as she gave the note into the hands of the faithful Maria.

And so Waverley Cleve received the answer to his resolutely prosecuted suit—"Yes!"

It was not until the answer was past recall that Angie Gresham half trembled at the consciousness that she, who scarce ever before had ventured to choose a ribbon or a dress without her mother's advice and sanction, had boldly taken her destiny into her own hands.

"But it can not be wrong, or I should not be so happy!" thought Angie.

But these were not the only circumstances of importance to our story which transpired at Beechcliff during that eventful July evening.

It was past eleven o'clock when Mrs. Delamere, wearied with her exertions as hostess, and unaware of the by-play of affairs going on around her, finally went up to her own suite of rooms.

Mathilde—the same light-hearted Frenchy little damsel who had been her maid in Paris—was sitting at her needle-work in the shaded lamp-light.

"I am very tired, Mathilde," she said, wearily. "I believe I shall go directly to bed."

"If madame pleases," interposed Mathilde, moving forward a low easy-chair for her mistress, "Giuseppe would like to speak to madame for an instant, before she retires."

"Tell him to come in, then."

And in a minute or two Giuseppe entered the sitting-room.

"Well, Giuseppe?" asked his mistress.

"Madame," said the man, bowing in his old obsequious way, "would my temporary absence inconvenience you much?"

"Your temporary absence, Giuseppe? What do you mean?"

"I have this day received a letter from Italy, madame. My poor old father—the saints be kind to him!—lies very ill, and wishes to give me his blessing ere he departs. I am but a poor man, madame, but I have my feelings, and—"

"Go, by all means, Giuseppe." There was a perceptible accent of relief in Mrs. Delamere's tone. "I dare say Mrs. Hyde and Perkins and the rest can manage to do without you

for awhile very well. And if you are not well supplied with money I will write you a check for five hundred dollars at once!"

"Madame is too kind. Madame may rest assured that I will not prolong my stay an instant beyond the time actually necessary."

"You need not hurry back, Giuseppe," said Mrs. Delamere, coolly. "Remain as long as you please. And," she added, within herself, "I wish it might be forever!"

Giuseppe smiled a covert smile, as he drew his hand across his mouth with a peculiar sort of motion he had.

"If madame would write the check to-night," he said, "there would be no useless delays in the morning, and—"

"Certainly."

Ida drew her desk toward her, and wrote the check at once.

"There! take it, Giuseppe," she said, carelessly, "and begone!"

Giuseppe obeyed; and Ida Delamere drew a long breath as she felt the oppression of his presence withdrawn.

"At least," she thought, "I shall breathe more easily for the next few days, although I can never feel entirely free while Giuseppe dwells like a Nemesis within my gates, and while—"

She shuddered as there rose up before her memory the outlines of a fair, oval face, with gold-brown hair and blue eyes—a face she had once loved so dearly, and which now she tried persistently, yet in vain, to banish from her remembrance—her mother's face!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TROUT-FISHING.

THE faint crimson of the summer sunrise had scarcely begun to deepen through the pearl-gray mists of dawn that hung over the tranquil course of the Connecticut River, when two pedestrians crossed the dewy lawn, and took their way in the direction of a ravine some two or three miles distant, where a clear little trout-stream wound itself among rocks and overhanging trees, now brawling noisily over a pebbly bottom, and perhaps a little further on forming deep, sunless pools, beneath the tangled shadow of overhanging trees and bushes, woven with clematis and wild vines.

"It's barbarous to rouse you up so early," said Mr. Dudley, stopping on the extreme confines of the ornamental grounds to light a cigar; "but then you can't call yourself properly

Americanized until you've caught a basketful of our real gold-speckled trout directly out of their native waters."

"It is not too early for me," his companion answered—Frederic Dorrillon. "This morning's coolness is perfectly delicious, and I suppose a long walk will only give us the more zest for our sport!"

"Sport!" echoed Dudley. "I believe you! There's nothing like it in all Scottish lakes and meres. Trout-fishing in these rocky glens is a new era in a man's life—a living picture—a poem written in lines of emerald green, and set to the song of birds and the music of waters!"

Dorrillon looked at him with a smile.

"You are enthusiastic, Hugh!"

"No—only appreciative. Just wait till we come to the spot. I knew Mrs. Hyde would provide us with a goodly preparation for the wants of the inner man," with a motion of his head toward the flat wicker basket suspended across his shoulders by a strap, "and you see it's neither more nor less than a picnic, without the trouble of making yourself agreeable to the ladies."

"I should scarcely have supposed you found that a trouble, Hugh," said Dorrillon, dryly.

"It is not, except when one is in the mood for silence and solitude. You can talk to a man or not, as you please; a woman thinks you rude unless you keep up a perpetual chatter; *ergo*, a man is the fitting companion for an expedition like this. Well," as they left the fern-grown footpath and struck into a deep dell, almost perpendicular in its descent, and canopied over with the boughs of dense-growing trees, "how do you like Beechcliff?"

"Very much indeed—what I have seen of it."

"And its inhabitants?"

"And its inhabitants!"

"You will like them better still when you know them more intimately."

"Shall I?"

"Most of them. Our hostess—what do you think of her?"

"What do I think of Mrs. Delamere?" slowly repeated Dorrillon.

"Yes—isn't she the most beautiful woman you ever saw in your life?"

"Yes, I think she is," answered Dorrillon, after a moment's silence, as if he were turning over the idea in his brain.

"And remains a widow still; that's the most puzzling part of it," added Dudley.

"Why puzzling?" asked his comrade.

"Oh, I don't know; one naturally expects a beautiful widow to marry a second time, especially when she is young and wealthy as well, and besieged by a host of suitors."

"Is that Mrs. Delamere's case?"

"Exactly. Do you wonder at it?"

"Not at all, under the circumstances."

"No one would, I believe. Oh, she'll marry again, in time."

Mr. Dorrillon raised his eyes slowly to the face of his friend, and Dudley thought how pale the reflection of the green moving leaves upon his face made him look.

"Perhaps," he said, "Mrs. Delareme's married life has not been of a character to tempt her to court the yoke a second time. Was she happy in her first marriage?"

"I suppose so," said Dudley. "I have never heard her speak of it."

"How long have you been acquainted with her?" asked Dorrillon.

"Two—three years. I met her in Switzerland three years ago this very summer. We Americans fraternize very readily in a foreign country, and a week of glacier wanderings and *châlet* explorations made us better friends than a century of conventional meetings in New York society would have done."

"Had she been a widow then?"

"Oh, yes, several years. In fact, people were always talking about the possibility of her marrying a gentleman who was with their party at the time—this very Ferdinand Fairfax, who is to arrive at Beechcliff to-day, by the way."

"Ah!" Mr. Dorrillon began to seem interested at last. "She liked him, then?"

"I think she did, after a fashion. He is very handsome, very sprightly, very agreeable—in fact, the most delightful companion one can conceive for a summer tour through the Alps."

"And she refused him?"

"No; it never reached that crisis. He was suddenly called away by the death of a relative in Baden-Baden, and their parties, once separated, did not again join."

"I thought she said yesterday that he accompanied her home from Europe this spring."

"He did, I believe; but a voyage from Europe nowadays, in one of our crack steamers, is a brief thing. They saw very little of each other, I imagine. I am not sorry he is coming to Beechcliff; he is a pleasant fellow, and if the pretty little

widow should conclude to change her condition, and marry a second time, I know of no one whom I would prefer to see win the prize than Ferdinand Fairfax!"

"You think there is a probability of it, then?" said Mr. Dorrillon.

"I don't really think anything positive about it. I have only told you what my impressions and conjectures are. Here is as good a place as any to throw in our maiden lines, Dorrillon—this dark bend of the stream—and now I hope you have a good stock of patience."

"Yes, more than my share."

"You can't have too much for this sort of thing," said Dudley.

A long silence ensued, broken only by the murmuring sound of the clear brown waters above and below the glassy pool, which, inclosed by a jutting point of moss-carpeted rock, formed a miniature pond, and the soft rustling of the summer air in the branches overhead, with now and then the occasional chirp and twitter of a bird darting through the green gloom.

At length Hugh Dudley spoke.

"Dorrillon!"

His companion started, as if from a deep reverie.

"Why don't you go in for her yourself?"

"For whom?"

"For Mrs. Delamere, to be sure — the charming little widow."

"I?"

The cold dew broke out upon Dorrillon's forehead—his upper lip twitched nervously.

"Yes," affirmed Dudley. "Why not?"

"You don't know what you are talking about, Dudley," said the other, shortly.

"But I think I do—why shouldn't I? And why, pray tell me, isn't your chance as good as any of them? You are a gentleman, well born and well looking, and not without fortune."

"Yes."

"And she—she's but a woman, after all, in spite of her melting eyes and satin skin, and voice like a thrush's warble. I say, Dorrillon, why shouldn't you marry her?"

"Would you have me overshadow any bright woman's life with the gloom and darkness of my own destiny?" demanded the other.

"That's a Scotch whim, Dorrillon, nothing more."

"It may be a Scotch whim—but I shall never marry."

"I should like to lay a pretty considerable wager on that," laughed Dudley.

"I am not in the betting mood," returned his companion, shortly.

"Well, if you can resist the fire of Ida Delamere's eyes—"

"She will not try to captivate me."

"She will captivate you without any effort of trying on her part. I tell you, man, she is a born Queen of Hearts!"

"I can easily believe it, but her instinct will teach her that I am not one of the vulnerable kind."

Dudley looked at his companion long and earnestly.

"I believe you would make an excellent husband for Ida Delamere," he said.

"You were never more mistaken in your life," was the answer, slowly and emphatically given.

"Dorrillon, I wish you would answer me one question."

"What is it?"

"Were you ever in love?"

"Yes."

"Really and deeply?"

"Really and deeply."

"And circumstances came between you and that love?"

"Yes."

"Forever?"

Dorrillon hesitated a moment before he replied:

"Yes, forever."

"But does the future hold no new hopes or possibilities for you?"

"Do the dead rise from the grave?"

"She is dead, then. My poor fellow, I should not have pressed you so closely."

Dorrillon was leaning over the dark trout pool, his head resting on his hand, the other hand mechanically balancing the long, slender pole, whose line swept the black, sunless waters. He made no answer, and Hugh Dudley felt that he had gone too far.

"It's a pity, too," he thought. "Such a fine fellow as he is, and he can't be thirty yet. I mean to ask the old admiral the whole story some day, if ever I live to see the Scottish shores again. Dead, is she? well, better a dead love than a living sorrow, I suppose. *La reine est morte, vive la reine!* I would back Ida Delamere's fresh, real beauty against a score of haunting memories at any time!"

When he spoke again, it was on quite another and indiffer-

ent topic. The shore of the stream was clothed with the gold-gleaming trophies of hook and line, and Dudley was triumphant over their success.

"We have already secured more than I looked for all day," he said, complacently surveying the result of their sport. "Are you tired, Dorrillon?"

"Tired?" laughingly echoed his companion. "Have you forgotten the deer-stalking days in Scotland, to imagine that I am so easily played out?"

"Then we'll follow the stream a little further up. I know these haunts well enough to prophesy better luck still, if we are faithful to our work."

It was late in the evening before the two votaries of piscatorial warfare returned once more to Beechcliff, wearied, yet enthusiastic, with dewy hair, and feet soiled with the damp earth, while sundry rents in their garments bore witness to the glens they had scrambled through, and the precipitous heights they had scaled.

"Confound it all!" ejaculated Dudley, stopping short at the edge of the woods, "they are all out in the garden—can't we manage to slip round by the back way? I don't exactly care to meet them in my present guise, even by moonlight!"

The two friends, retreating once more into the woods, crossed a broad, shaded avenue that ran northward from the house, and came on to the back piazza, entering the broad hall by the eastern door.

"We are safe for our own rooms now," said Dudley. "There, James," to the servant, "take these trout and have them put on the ice at once."

"You've had a good day's sport, sir," said James, admiringly, as he lifted the lid of the basket and peered in at the gleaming treasures it contained.

"Tell Mrs. Hyde to give us a trout breakfast to-morrow morning," said Dudley, as he turned toward the staircase.

Just at that instant, as adverse fate would have it, the lower drawing-room door opened, and Mrs. Delamere, robed in some shining summer fabric that glistened like snow and silver, came out, leaning lightly on the arm of a tall, stylish-looking stranger.

"Here the truants are," said Ida, laughing. "We have missed you all day, and marveled what could possibly have become of you!"

"Fairfax," ejaculated Dudley, dropping the tackle and forgetting his besplashed garments and disheveled hair, "I'm delighted to meet you again, old fellow!"

Mr. Dorrillon could see that the stranger was handsome, with a refined, delicately chiseled correctness of outline, and dressed in simple, good taste in evening toilet—and he fancied, as he stood there, that Mr. Fairfax's eyes were fixed with a surprise that he construed into superciliousness upon his own somewhat unique appearance.

Mrs. Delamere broke the spell of annoyance with her soft, clear tones.

"Mr. Fairfax, allow me to introduce you to Mr. Dorrillon, from Scotland."

Mr. Fairfax bowed courteously and extended his hand. Mr. Dorrillon stiffly returned the salutation and did not touch the proffered hand.

He was vexed to feel the advantage which spotless linen, glossy broadcloth, and a purple silk neck-tie, worn after the latest modes, gave.

He tried to persuade himself, as he went upstairs, that there was something effeminate in the jeweled, scented hand that he had tacitly rejected.

"A puppy," he said to himself, "a mere *ephemera*—and yet I would rather have had our first meeting on more equal grounds!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

MR. DORRILLON'S JOURNAL.

MR. DORRILLON'S own room was a large, spacious apartment on the second floor, its windows opening on small stone balconies, filled with flowers, and shaded by striped Venetian awnings, whose dark-green fringes swayed softly in the cool evening air. It was furnished after a summer-like fashion, with light bamboo furniture, draped with green-and-white chintz, and the floor was covered with China matting, while tall, narrow-necked vases of some rare rose-colored porcelain, standing on either side of the mantel, like high-shouldered sentinels, were filled with dried rose leaves, whose faint fragrance, stealing out in odorous gusts, made the whole room sweet. A pretty apartment, hung round with choice line engravings, and papered in pale green, with white wavy lines, like the foamy edges of sea-water at high tide, it carried an impression of coolness with it that was very pleasant on a sultry evening like the present. A silver ornament, shaped like a cluster of lilies, from which four wax-candles shone, stood on the table.

Mr. Dorrillon drew the easy-chair up beside it, and opened

a locked portfolio which lay there with a key which he took from his watch-chain.

Then he leaned back against the green-and-white cushions, closing his eyes for a few minutes to think.

It was but a few minutes, and then he drew the little alabaster inkstand toward him, and unclosing a small leathern-covered manuscript book nearly filled with close, neatly penned entries, he commenced to write—slowly, deliberately, and pausing now and then, with dreamy eyes fixed on the stars shining through the Venetian fringes, as if the very act of writing was a species of thought to him—a relief, an outlet to the fancies and memories that filled his heart.

And, in a measure, it was so. Frederic Dorrillon had no confidants but himself and this little book. He had filled many like it before, and destroyed them all; he would destroy this one when it was complete—yet, in the present, it was an indispensable companion and relief to him.

"July 31.—At Beechcliff," they ran, the words that flowed so swiftly, involuntarily as it were, from the point of the gold pen he always preferred to use. "A summer day in the woods—chance memories evoked, and laid to rest again. Dudley came very near guessing the truth once, but my seeming frankness misled him. I am weary of dissimulation—will the time never come in which I can be myself again? I have seen my rival to-night. The house here is full of cavaliers of one sort and another, all of them more or less declared admirers of Ida. Yet, until to-night, I have seen only one who, in my opinion, deserves the title of rival. His name is Fairfax—he is a good-looking personage, and apparently a gentleman. I think, if I were a woman, I might admire him myself. It seems that he and Ida are old acquaintances, that people have even hazarded conjectures, before now, upon her probable acceptance of him, should he propose. Was it Fate or Providence that sent me here just now to watch the course of events as they develop?

"Ida is more beautiful than ever. Hers is a style which I always knew would ripen into splendid maturity. She is less changed, however, than I am. I should have known her anywhere—in Turkey, on the steppes of Siberia, among the forests of Patagonia, disguised in a costume the most improbable. She looked me full in the face, laid her hand—her little velvet-soft palm—which thrilled me through and through—in mine, and said, as a stranger, 'I am glad to meet you, Mr. Dorrillon!'

"How I had dreamed of, pictured to myself, dreaded that interview. But the moment I saw her face I knew there would be no danger of her remembering her husband. Have I then changed so much? Is there no trace of Reginald Delamere left in the form and aspect of Frederic Dorrillon? Do we alter so completely as to deceive even ourselves? I look at myself sometimes in the glass, and try to trace the old lineaments, the familiar expressions, and know that they are no longer there. Sudden griefs, the shock of a great anguish—these have blanched men's hair before now, and stricken them with a change as unaccountable as it is complete. Why should not a grief like mine have power to transform the human face? Yet it is not transformation, but growth. To all appearances I am a man of thirty now, although I have in reality not yet reached my twenty-seventh year. I was a boy of eighteen when we parted—a beardless, dimple-chinned boy. My height, my hair, my complexion, even the tones of my voice, have changed. Rex Delamere is dead and buried, and Frederic Dorrillon is the phenix that has risen out of his ashes.

"What a strange life mine has been now that I look back upon it. That bright winter morning at Ischia—shall I ever forget it? the morning on which, according to the received acceptation of the world, I died! Was it a presentiment that made me change my mind at the very shore, with my foot resting on the boat's keel, and decide not to go? They who believe in fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute, would term it so. Paolo, the tall boatman, begged to take the signor's place. He had a sweetheart on the other shore, poor fellow, but not expecting to go, he had left his upper garment behind. I threw him mine.

"'I am returning directly to the inn, Paolo; you will be back by evening at the latest.'

"'*Si*, signor,' he would be back by evening.

"Poor Paolo; I knew he was as honest as the day, and, consequently, I gave no second thought to the purse of money, the watch, and the memorandum-book which were in the inner pocket of the overcoat.

"It was a mild morning, spring-like and balmy at first. My single coat was sufficiently warm, and, strolling along the shores of the island, I did not care to return to the hotel. When the sudden gust came up, with waves rolling breast high, sky hidden by ink-black clouds, and the trees wrestling wildly with the gale, I took refuge in a fisherman's deserted hut. It was a shelter, though not a luxurious one, and when

at night I neared the settlement once more, I heard two rough fellows, who were hangers-on at the inn, one telling the other of my death. My body, it seemed—I heard it with a shudder—had been picked up where the waves had washed it ashore, so disfigured by the rocks and the tempest which had thrown me against their jutting edges, that I was identified only by the coat I wore, the memorandum-book, and the money. My remains—and another shudder thrilled me here—had been carried to Naples, and would there be interred, subject to the after wishes of my friends.

"So I was dead and buried. The fate for which I had rashly wished, scarcely twenty-four hours before, had, it seemed, come to me according to popular report. Well, I accepted this fate. To my wife I was theoretically dead; let me become practically so. She, at least, would be free.

"I wandered over the lonely roads of Ischia half the night, forming schemes for the future and bidding the past a fond farewell. And when the gray morning dawned, it seemed to me as if I had actually passed out of the world into another. A new destiny had begun—a destiny which, to some degree, seemed positively forced upon me.

"In the indistinct twilight of the dawn, I was rowed across to Naples by a stalwart fisherman, who had never either seen or heard of me, as I selected the loneliest spot to cross, and that which was furthest from the spot I had been used to haunt. Had I learned, among the other particulars, the exact place where my supposed remains had been temporarily placed, I think I should have been tempted to risk all by going to look at my corpse—by allowing my second self, alive and full of vigor, to take leave of my first self, coffined and shrouded for the grave. As it was, however, I had but to go on the pilgrimage which I had set myself. I had no money, but I had youth, health, and strength. Money had never brought me aught but care and trouble. I would learn to do without it now.

"Let me see, what is the next prominent link which joins the past to the present? The moonlight night on which, crossing the Pyrenees, I happened along, just in time to rescue old Admiral Tyndale's carriage and frightened servants from the attack of the Italian brigands. It was no special act of bravery. We numbered actually more than our assailants, but the admiral was bewildered, and his attendants nothing more than a pack of terrified fools. However, it proved a pass-key to the heart of the genial old gentleman, and nothing would satisfy him but I must accompany him to Scotland. It mat-

tered little to me which way I went, and toward Scotland I accordingly bent my footsteps. Once there it was impossible to get away. The admiral had taken a fancy into his head that I was not unlike his son—a promising young man, who had been recently killed in the Crimea at the siege of Inkerman; and from the resemblance, real or fancied, resulted my formal adoption as his heir. I was still to retain the name of Frederic Dorrillon, which I had taken in default of my other appellation, but I was to be presented everywhere as the adopted son of Admiral Tyndale, of Glenholme.

"Since then my life has presented no very startling occurrences or peculiar incidents. I have continued to learn tidings of Ida every now and then. Without this poor consolation I should have perished of heart-hunger—of inanition of the soul. As long as I knew she was well and happy in her sweet, innocent fashion, I lived on, and was content—dreary and monotonous as my own life was, Ida's happiness—that was all I expected or hoped for now. My own peace was utterly wrecked, my own life made purposeless, but she should not be made to suffer with me for what was, after all, wholly my own fault.

"So things transpired peacefully, until I ascertained—no matter how—that Mrs. Delamere, the lovely young American widow, who had lived abroad for so many years, was returning home, to a country seat she had purchased with the money her husband had left her, on some impossibly beautiful river in America. This fancy of hers made matters essentially different; I became restless, unsettled, and miserable, until my resolution of following her was taken.

"Admiral Tyndale was glad I had a fancy for traveling. He wished me to see the world, as he expressed it. Alas! he did not know how much of this same unsatisfactory world I had already seen. My journey to America was taken with his full sanction and approval. The kind old man! His only regret was that I could not make up my mind to marry Marian Herondale, his niece, a red-haired Scottish lassie. 'I should have been pleased with the match, Fred, my boy,' he said to me, in his odd, brusque way; 'but love goes where it is sent, and you can not drive Cupid's doves into harness."

"Once in America I plotted a thousand ways of obtaining accurate intelligence of my wife-widow and her movements. But chance, ever my friend, stepped finally in, when I was at my wit's end, in the shape of my friend Hugh Dudley. He was staying at Beechcliff, the prettiest place in Connecticut, the guest of the loveliest creature I had ever seen—I should

say so myself when I came to meet her, and she had graciously extended her invitation to his friend from Scotland. How my heart throbbed! Dare I accept it, or dare I not? No, my apprehensive heart answered at first—*no!* But why not? argued cooler reason, seconded by the wild wish that rose up tumultuously in my heart. I was fairly mad, wild, frantic, to see her once again with my own eyes—my wife, my lost treasure, the gift I had put away from myself seven years ago. I *must* see her at all hazards if it were only for a second. I would not betray myself, but I was resolved to risk it. Besides, I told myself, I was so changed that there need be no real risk if only I could be master of myself. I had learned the lesson of self-control through years of discipline. I was quite certain that it would not fail me now. I accepted the invitation and came to Beechcliff. Shall I ever forget the moment in which I stood face to face with her? More beautiful than before—more winning than ever, my wife, whom I must not call my own—my treasure, of whom I had voluntarily given up the right. There was one dangerous moment in which love and passion threatened to usurp the throne of reason and common sense—in which I could have thrown all policy, all disguise to the winds and taken her to my heart, boldly claiming her in the sight of all the world. Taken her! Yes, taken her fair and waxen bloom and startled, wistful eyes, but not her heart nor her inner self. The body without the soul—the casket without its jewel. I scorned such a poor victory as that, and with an effort I retained my self-possession and remained—Frederic Dorrillon.

"One fact I have satisfied myself of by this experiment—I love Ida as well—nay, better than ever. Time has but strengthened my affection instead of dimming its fervor. Now, under these circumstances, how long may I reasonably hope to maintain my *incognito?*

"It depends entirely upon myself.

"If she cares for this Fairfax—nay, why do I shrink so foolishly from the word—if she loves him, my mission is complete. I can be generous still, with the poor generosity that throws away what is worthless to itself and all around it. I will sacrifice my life to the shrine of her happiness. To all intents and purposes, I have been dead for the last seven years; it will be but one more determined deed to lift the dark veil of shadows which separates me from the world beyond, and pass, actually as well as nominally, into the land whence I shall return no more. But of this I am resolved—she shall declare her preference for herself. I will either live and be

happy, or I will not live at all. Once or twice, as we stood in the shadows that overhung the peaceful river, she looked at me—she spoke to me as if— How my heart beat—how the blood boiled through my veins! If I could win, as Frederic Dorrillon, the love which never was mine as Reginald Delamere—if she could be mine, heart and soul, why, then I might dare in time to tell her this secret which I have hidden away in the inner depths of my own individuality so long.

"I thought this might be a possibility before I saw her leaning on Fairfax's arm to-night, her cheeks glowing, and her eyes full of that limpid softness I have watched so many a time. Now it seems far off and improbable. I have hoped in vain. It is useless to think of what might have been. But still I can not tear myself away from the morbid contemplation of my own misery. I am like the convicted prisoner waiting to hear his sentence of condemnation from the lips of the judge, though he already knows perfectly well what it will be. There is a fascination in being near her—in hearing the tones of her voice, even in sweet words spoken to others, which I can not voluntarily forego. And I will not. There are few enough blissful drops in my cup of joy—it would be madness for me to throw them away when they sparkle at my very lips!"

So far, Frederic Dorillon had written, when he folded up the book, replaced it once again in the portfolio, and locked the latter slowly and mechanically. And when he leaned back once again in the chair, pressing his hand to his forehead, as if wearied and exhausted, the white light from the wax-candles shone upon a face strangely worn and haggard.

"This life of constant self-repression and watchfulness," he murmured, almost under his breath, "it is wearing me out. When will it end?"

The hours waned by, and still he sat there, the candles burning away in the silver sockets, and the rose leaves filling the air with faint sweetness—sat there in his own house, with his own wife separated from him but a few doors and corridors, as utterly alone as if he had been a sheeted ghost risen up from the dead!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LOOKING INTO HER OWN HEART.

THE days at Beechcliff went by, one by one, like the pleasant lapses of a dream.

There were boating-parties, picnic groupings, croquet matches, and sometimes, when the sultry August heats seemed to put anything like active exertion out of the question, there were long days spent under the shadow of the elm-trees on the lawn, with the humming of bees, and the odor from the rose gardens weaving summer visions around them. The guests lingered on, many of them beyond the limits originally appointed for their stay. There was but little change or alteration in their number, with the exception of Victoria Lyndhurst and her uncle, who had left rather abruptly.

Mr. Dudley had returned to the practice of his profession in New York; but, somewhat to his surprise, Mr. Frederic Dorrillon had concluded to prolong his stay a few days.

"All right, Fred," said the lawyer, with a knowing little nod of the head. "There are many more disagreeable places to stay at than Beechcliff."

Two among the party of guests were as uninterruptedly happy as it is in the nature of humanity to be—Mr. Cleve and Angie Gresham. The suit of the former had met with the full sanction and approval of Mr. and Mrs. Gresham; in fact, Mrs. Gresham was not a little flattered and delighted at the prospect of her fair little daughter's good fortune.

"I've lived a contented, hard-working life all my days," she said, "but that's no reason my daughter should; and, only to think of it, they say he has a clear income of six thousand a year!"

"They say, my dear," said the Reverend Mr. Gresham, "that he is a young man of good character and excellent moral principles, which is more to the point."

"That is a matter of course," said his wife.

"It is not always a matter of course, Selina."

"Well, at all events, it's an excellent match for the child; and I *do* wonder what Geoffrey and Eleanor will say when we write the news to them?"

For the rector's wife was in a flutter of delicious excitement at the not very distant prospect of a wedding at Deepdale, which should come up to her ideas of what a wedding should be. Eleanor had been quietly married, as befitted her modest alliance and not very pecuniarily plenteous circumstances; but Angie's wedding would be a very different thing, the mother mused, with visions of orange-flowers, white rep silk at four dollars a yard, and a bridal cake which should be like unto a segment of the White Mountains in its snowy splendor of ornamentations.

"Angie will make a pretty bride," thought Mrs. Gresham,

complacently. "Girls with fair skins and blue eyes always do look well in white!"

As for Mrs. Delamere, she felt herself being gradually drawn more and more into a region of enchanted dream-life—how, and why, she could not have explained to herself, though she felt the mystic influence. What was it? In what did it consist? Was Beechcliff under a spell, or was it her own heart changing unconsciously within her?

Mr. Dorrillon and Ferdinand Fairfax haunted her footsteps with persistent attention, as cavaliers of the olden time might have kept jealous watch over some precious jewel of cherished maidenhood. Ida felt it, and yet she did not resent it—on the contrary, there was a shy pride in it which she would not have acknowledged even to her own self.

But Ida knew that the world was changing to her—nor did she wish that aught should be different. It was very sweet and strange, and it was as yet a mystery to her.

"Angie," she said, one night, to the fair-haired *fiancée*, after they had gone upstairs together and were brushing out their hair in that demi-toilet of white muslin and lace which is so much prettier than the formal draperies of full dress, "you are very happy, are you not?"

"Yes, very," Angie answered, fervently.

"Always?"

"Always, Ida."

Mrs. Delamere, with her silky black hair hanging loosely over her shoulders and the pearl-backed brush glimmering through its jetty confusion, looked musingly at Angie.

"What is it like, Angie, this love that a woman feels toward the man who is to be all in all to her? Tell me."

"Oh, Ida," reproached Angie, gently, "did not you know it when you were engaged to Rex?"

"I was not engaged to him more than twenty minutes, you know, Angie," said Ida, laughing, although a faint, red tinge came to her cheek.

"But I shall not feel any differently after I am married, Ida."

"Do not be too sure of that, Angie."

"I could not love Waverley any more, Ida—of that I am quite certain."

"But you may love him less."

"No." Angie shook the golden, downfallen masses quite resolutely. "That can not possibly be. What made you think of such a thing, Ida?"

"I don't know; the instinct of making one's self disagreea-

ble, I suppose. But you haven't told me yet, Angie, what I asked you."

"As if you did not know already."

Ida laid down her brush, and taking Angie's hands in hers drew the girl to a low seat close by her side.

"But I would like to see what this love-dream is like, through your eyes, just once, my darling. How does he look to you?"

Angie laid her blushing cheek on Ida's shoulder, as she replied in low, scarce audible tones:

"The noblest man in all the world—the best—the handsomest! There is no one like him in my eyes—he stands as high above the rest of his species as a prince might tower above a herd of low-born peasants."

"I thought so," murmured Ida, with kindling eyes. "I knew it! Tell me more, Angie—do you feel his presence thrilling through your veins, even when you do not see or hear him? Does the very touch of his hand make the blood tingle in your pulses?"

"Ida," exclaimed the girl, raising her head, "did *you* feel so toward Rex?"

"Then I am right?"

"Yes, you are right."

"Go on, Angie, I am listening."

"And the time seems long when he is away. I count the moments and the hours, he is all the clock I have, yet when he is by my side the seconds are winged and go too fast!"

Ida bent over and pressed her warm, soft lips to Angie's cheek.

"I am not mistaken, Angie," she said; "it is love that—that you feel. Love! Oh, Angie, what a mystery it is—what a grand, absorbing, glorious thing, the blossoming of life's century plant, which fills the world with glory once, and only once!"

Her melting, dark eyes were humid with tears, her face was strangely beautiful, as Angie looked shyly up into its pure, perfect lines.

"Oh, Ida!" she whispered, "you must have loved him so tenderly, and he is gone from you forever! It comes to me now as it never came before, the awful horror of widowhood!"

Ida sat silent, her fingers restlessly weaving themselves in and out of a long, golden tress which hung over Angie's cheek.

"God keep me from it!" murmured the young girl, her sympathetic nature thrilled for the other's sake.

"There is a widowhood of the heart which is worse than the other, Angie," slowly returned Ida, without raising her eyes. "God keep you from that, child!"

"What do you mean, Ida?"

"Do you see that clock?" said Ida, with a sudden return of laughing vivacity, as she pointed up to a small marble time-piece on the wall beyond. "Past one o'clock, and you are to be up at five to-morrow morning, to make one of the boating-party. It will be a clear day. Do you see how vividly the stars glow through the purple of the night sky?"

"I did not know it was so late," said Angie, penitently, as she rose and gathered up her little paraphernalia of toilet belongings. "You are going with us, Ida?"

"Yes, I promised Mr. Fairfax."

"Good-night, Ida."

"Good-night, Angie."

But, late as it was, Mrs. Delamere did not seek her couch after Angelina Gresham had left her. She still sat, with her black hair rippling loosely over her shoulders, and her small hands clasped in her lap, thinking: "It is so strange," she murmured to herself. "I had fancied that my life would have passed away without this wondrous key-note of my nature ever being struck, and now—hitherto I have merely existed—now I am beginning to live. There is no use in willfully blinding myself further. I *do* love him; I *do*. Yet not for worlds would I have him read the secret of my heart, until—"

And Ida paused in her disconnected reverie, with cheeks burning and crimsoned. She could not give her love unsought—she could not even make a sign of what lay in her heart. No, she must drink that bitterest cup of womanhood, waiting, and doubt, and tremulous uncertainty.

The nature which had lain dormant so long was roused at length at the touch of the arch-magician—Love. Ida knew it and felt it, yet she was powerless to decide her own fate.

Of all created beings, a woman can be the happiest or the most miserable.

She rose up and went to the window, where the fair elm-shadowed lawns of Beechcliff lay before her in the starlight, the fountain glimmering faintly, and the scent of roses weighing down the air with spice. In the distance lay hills of wooded upland, and the murmurous sound of the river in the valley rose up like an unsyllabled hymn in the silence of the midsummer night. Truly, it was a fair domain, and one of which any woman's heart might be proud.

Yet Ida Delamere turned away from its contemplation with a low sigh.

"I would give it all—all," she murmured, passionately, "to be loved! I would exchange it for a cottage on the dreariest hill in the world, with his heart to bear me company."

The little fluttering wild bird—Love—was caught at last.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PICNIC IN THE WOODS.

"IDA! Ida! where are you? We are all ready—make haste!"

Helena Fairfax's sweet, clear voice rang from the lawn in front of the portico, as she stood swinging her white parasol to and fro, the rest of the party making their way down the shelving pathway which led to the boat-house on the river's edge. Ida had returned to the house to give one last order to Mrs. Hyde about the refreshments which were to be sent by the overland route to meet them at a moss-carpeted grove some twelve or fifteen miles up the river.

"In a minute, Helena; don't wait. I will overtake you."

Miss Fairfax looked laughingly at her brother who stood by her side.

"Certainly we shall wait," he said, quietly.

Ida was hurrying through the hall, her round hat hanging by its white ribbons from her arm, when, as she passed the half-open library door, she saw a figure stretched listlessly on the sofa that filled the deep bay-window. She stopped suddenly.

"Mr. Dorrillon!"

"Mrs. Delamere!"

"Can it be possible that this is you?"

"You see it for yourself, Mrs. Delamere," was the somewhat indifferently spoken response.

"But you are to be one of our party to-day?" she asked, eagerly.

"I think not."

"Why?"

The word was spoken quickly, and perhaps with a spice of imperiousness in its tone. Mr. Dorrillon closed his book and looked up, the shadow of a smile hovering round his lips, as if he liked to defy this imperative mood.

"Because I have not yet been asked."

"Did you think it necessary to await a formal invitation?"

she asked, relentlessly tearing into pieces a rose which she wore at her belt, while two round crimson spots glowed on her cheeks.

"I am not in the habit of volunteering my society unasked."

"You want me to invite you now?"

"As you please, Mrs. Delamere."

"You take advantage of my being your hostess, Mr. Dorrillon."

"I take advantage of nothing," he answered, slowly, his eyes fixed on her flushed, beautiful face. "There are various ways of enjoying one's self, and I dare say I shall pass a very pleasant day in the companionship of the books in your library."

"Then you do not wish to go?"

"Nay, you are hardly logical now. Did I say that I did not wish to go?"

"You left me to infer it."

Mr. Dorrillon lifted his eyebrows slightly.

"Are we not verging on verbal battle for a very insignificant matter, Mrs. Delamere?" he asked.

Ida did not answer directly.

"Will you go with us, Mr. Dorrillon?" she asked, speaking as if the words were wrung from her against her will.

"Do you wish me to go?" he questioned, slowly, and watching her face with keen eyes of inquiry.

"I do wish you to go," she said, in a low voice; and scarcely looking up from the flower-stem in her hand.

He rose at once.

"Then I shall be happy to accompany you, although I have a misgiving that your invitation is forced from you from a sense of duty merely."

"I am not going to have all my inner motives dissected for your benefit," said Ida, a little haughtily. "We must make haste; the rest are at the river-side by this time."

"Will you take my arm?"

"No—I would rather not."

At the same instant Mr. Fairfax, who had been lounging on a rustic chair on the portico, rose and advanced into view as they passed through the door.

"At last," he said, gayly. Mr. Dorrillon's keen glance, first at Fairfax and then at Ida, spoke plainly enough the thoughts that were in his mind. "It was because you made sure of this man's companionship that you refused to accept the offer of my arm!"

Ida was hotly indignant with herself, for the blood rose in a vivid carmine torrent to her cheeks as she met his eyes.

He smiled slightly, and turned to Miss Fairfax.

"Will you allow me to be your escort to the river-side, Miss Helena?"

She took his arm at once, and they walked a little in advance of the others to join the impatient group below.

Helena Fairfax was a soft-eyed, gentle-looking girl, some four- or five-and-twenty, with glossy hair, and features which, if not strictly regular, were exceedingly pleasing. She liked Mr. Dorrillon, and admired him, and was consequently not ill pleased with the fate which had temporarily assigned him to her for a companion.

The party were detailed off into two large pleasure-boats, cushioned with crimson moreen, and covered with awnings, bound with vivid scarlet, and Dorrillon observed, not without that peculiar expression of his eyes which could hardly be defined either as a smile or a frown, that Ferdinand Fairfax maneuvered very skillfully to place Mrs. Delamere and himself in the last unoccupied seat of the first craft.

Mrs. Delamere looked round a little uneasily.

"I thought we were going in the other boat," she said.

Fairfax bit his lip, but rose promptly in the boat.

"Just as you would prefer; shall we exchange?"

Ida looked up and met Dorrillon's eyes fixed full upon her.

"No," she said, resolutely, "I choose to remain here."

And Mr. Dorrillon and Miss Fairfax took their places in the second boat.

It was a long, lovely row, in the dewy coolness of the summer morning, the boatmen keeping in the shadows of the western shore, where the plash of the oars kept time to the warbling of the birds and the murmuring of insects, whenever a momentary pause in the conversation allowed time to listen to this under-current of Nature's orchestra; and it was nearly noon when they landed at the grove which was their destination.

The commissary department had arrived before them, and the impromptu table, consisting of a satin damask cloth, spread on the greensward in the most level spot, was ready, with its display of cold chicken, daintily dressed salads, tongues, ham, cake, and jellies. A glass pail stood in the middle, filled with golden slices of lemon, lumps of ice, and claret—tinted liquid—Mrs. Hyde's matchless lemonade—and the wines were awaiting summons, in their ice-pails, among the bushes near at hand.

"Is it very unromantic to be hungry, I wonder?" questioned Angie of Mr. Cleve.

"Not at all," said Ida, who, as hostess, had walked promptly to the head of the sylvan table. "We must eat first, to sustain fainting nature, and then we will be romantic at our leisure. Come, all of you, I shall give no second invitation."

"Nor any special one?" asked Mr. Dorrillon, quietly.

"Nor any special one," said Ida. "What splendid peaches these are! I told Mrs. Hyde to be sure and pick out the nicest ones on the south wall—and there are some grapes, too, somewhere."

"They are on the ice, ma'am," said James, who was presiding as temporary butler. "I will bring them on with the wine."

A merrier party could hardly have convened than the group whose voices now made the woodland shadows musical with gay words and laughter, provoked by almost nothing. Every one was in a good humor, and every one was determined to be pleased, consequently the impromptu banquet "went off" splendidly.

No sooner was the cloth removed than the croquet arches were promptly installed on the level spot it had partially occupied, and those who had not been smitten by the croquet mania wandered off, in cozy *tête-à-têtes*, into the woods to enjoy the shade and coolness, and explore the solitudes for the few wild flowers which were still in bloom, party-colored mosses, and ferns.

Mr. Dorrillon had watched Fairfax and Mrs. Delamere slowly sauntering down one of the silent, leafy aisles, until a growth of alder bushes hid them from his view, and so intent was his absorbtion that his companion spoke twice to him before he heard her.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Fairfax. Were you addressing me?"

"I spoke to you twice!" laughed Helena, who was too good-natured to take offense at any such casual affront to her self-esteem.

Dorrillon bit his lips. "I must have been dreaming! Will you be so indulgent as to repeat your remark a third time?"

"It is hardly original enough to bear such frequent repetition," said Helena, demurely. "However, since such is your wish you shall have the benefit of it. Don't you think the day is growing very warm?"

"I do most emphatically. Shall we look for a cooler place?"

"Where shall we find it?" asked Helena, dubiously.

"In the woods, I dare say. At least we shall have the satisfaction of seeking for it, unless you prefer playing at croquet!"

"I detest croquet," said Helena, with energetic earnestness.

"So do I. Let us shake hands upon it!"

And on this mutual confession of faith, Mr. Dorrillon and Miss Fairfax strolled down toward the river, whose blue, rippling current gave at least an impression of coolness, if not its actual reality.

They talked idly on one subject or another, with long silences between, both evidently preoccupied, until at length Helena Fairfax looked up with an abrupt laugh, and said:

"I must seem strangely absent-minded to you, Mr. Dorrillon, but my thoughts are full to-day."

"Are they?"

"Yes; and not of myself."

"I should easily have imagined that, Miss Fairfax, without being told. I do not think you are a selfish person."

Helena looked wistfully at him.

"I wish I dared tell you what it is, Mr. Dorrillon; I would fain have the courage to share my hopes and fears with some one else."

"Does it require so much courage to confide in me?" he asked, smiling.

"My impression is that it does not," she answered, in the same tone.

"Have the goodness, then, to act upon your impression."

"We have been very good friends," said Helena, frankly, "and I think I might tell you."

"You think you might tell me? Are you not sure? And what does this mighty mystery of preamble foretell? I can guess!"

"Guess, then," she said.

"You are going to be married!"

"No, I am not; but possibly some one else is. You are getting 'warm,' as the children say."

"Some one else? Your particular friend, perhaps, to whom you write long, double-sheet letters, and send embroidery patterns by every mail."

"Some one nearer and dearer than that," persisted Helena, shaking her head.

"I can't guess; you will have to tell me."

"Well, then, it is my brother?"

"Your brother?"

Frederic Dorrillon echoed the words, quite unaware that he was doing so. In that one instant he felt that his fate was sealed; he saw the far-off shining gates of a fancied happiness closing on him forever; he saw Ida standing at the flower-wreathed altar with this tall, well-featured Ferdinand Fairfax by her side, and caught himself wondering if the lonely, nameless grave—his grave—would cast a shadow on her radiant path if she knew of it. If! And in the hushed silence of the woods a little bird broke into a golden rivulet of song just in time to warn him that he must speak—that Helena Fairfax's expectant eyes were on him.

"So he is to be married—your brother?" he said, hoarsely.

"Now you are getting on too fast," she rejoined, laughing a little nervously. "I did not say he was to be married; I said it was possible that he might be."

"Then—"

Frederic Dorrillon knew it was not an honorable thing to do; but, for the life of him, he could not have repressed the question burning on his lips if Helena had not anticipated it by interrupting him.

"He has not yet proposed; but we, brother and sister, are all in all to each other, Mr. Dorrillon, and Ferdinand tells me everything. He said to one this morning that he should ask her to be his wife to-day. He can not endure the suspense any longer, nor is there any reason that he should. He has known her a long time, you know."

"Her?"

"Ida."

Mr. Dorrillon sat watching the azure current of the river, stunned, as it were, and hardly alive to what was going on around him. Presently Helena Fairfax again spoke, in a low, earnest voice, stirred by emotion.

"So, you see, it is an important day to Ferdinand—a day of destiny. I have been thinking of him all day; I am thinking of him now. Heaven grant his suit may prosper! You see, Mr. Dorrillon, he has loved her so long, so tenderly." Mr. Dorrillon did not speak, but he turned his face, pale and haggard, a trifle toward her; and Helena, with her heart too full of her subject to take heed of aught else, went eagerly on. It was a relief to open her thoughts to another—to be able to speak freely on this all-engrossing topic. "And I do not marvel at it, Mr. Dorrillon; she is so sweet, so beautiful. I can see that even with my woman's eyes. I can understand the spell

which she enchants people with. I am half in love with her myself. I don't wonder that Ferdinand is infatuated."

"God bless you for that!" Mr. Dorrillon leaned forward and took Helena Fairfax's hand in his. She started to feel how icy cold its clasp was.

"I mean," he added, suddenly roused to a sense of his own imprudence, "it is so unusual to see one woman who appreciates another—it is so generous."

"Not so unusual as you gentlemen suppose," said Helena, standing up as the champion of her sex. "On the contrary, it is quite frequent."

"And he will propose to-day—your brother?"

"He told me that he should. Oh, Mr. Dorrillon, do you wonder that I am excited and absorbed, when so much—oh, so much of Ferdinand's destiny hangs upon the syllable to be spoken this day from a woman's lips?"

"He loves her very dearly then?"

"As dearly as his own life. It has not been the brief passion of a few weeks with him; it has matured for years. He loved her when he first saw her, and he has loved her ever since!"

"It is strange," thought Dorrillon, "what a power this woman has for throwing the chains of her fascinations over every one—for entrancing them, with or without their own will. Cleopatra of Egypt was such a one, and so was the beautiful Mary of Scotland. It is a gift—a spell—and Heaven knows whether it is to be considered a blessing or a curse!"

As these thoughts passed through his mind, he spoke, in answer to Helena's words:

"He would be a good husband to her, then, if—"

"If she accepts him! The best and truest husband in the world!"

"Do you suppose they would be happy?"

He knew not what impulse led him on to ask these questions. It seemed as if the words escaped his lips independently of his own volition, and Helena Fairfax answered him as frankly as he had spoken.

"I do not know how any woman could help being happy as Ferdinand's wife!"

Mr. Dorrillon rose suddenly.

"Shall we join the croquet-party? They will be wondering what has become of us."

He felt that he could no longer sit idly there, asking and answering questions—he must be alone, to look this coming

calamity full in the face. Solitude—silence—without these he should go mad.

Miss Fairfax wondered at his leaving her so abruptly when they reached the level open glade, where the croquet balls were clicking merrily against one another, and gay voices echoed, half a dozen at once. She could not account for this conduct, so much at variance with the usual calm, polished courtesy of his manner. Could she in any way have offended him? she asked herself, but her memory bore record of no word or look which could possibly have been unfavorably construed.

"It must have been my own imagination," thought Helena Fairfax, and then her mind went back to the all-engrossing subject of her brother and Mrs. Delamere. "I wonder what sort of a man Ida's first husband was?" she mused. "He lived less than a year after their marriage, I have heard—but it is very strange that no one ever hears her speak of him. If their married life was harmonious it is natural that she should wish to form another and a similar tie—if not, all the more reason that she should taste the cup of happiness so long withheld from her lips. Oh, I hope—I *hope* she loves Ferdinand!"

And what was Frederic Dorrillon thinking, as he lay all alone in the silence of the loveliest, most tangled spot in all those woods, his forehead pressed against the cool turf, his eyes closed to shut out the surrounding world—all alone with the jealous strife that tore his heart with relentless cruelty? He had foreseen this moment for years; he had thought himself daily to contemplate it as not only a possibility but a probability. Yet, now, when it was close upon him, he shrunk from it with a dread and horror past all description.

"Anything but that!" he moaned, in strange, hoarse accents. "Oh, merciful Father, anything but that! I could have lived without her love, but I can not bear to know that it is given to another! I never knew how dearly I loved her before! I never knew how closely she was treasured in my heart! Ida! my wife—mine! and mine only! How can I let her go? It is false! She has not gone—she *shall* not! I will keep her for myself if—"

And then a better and gentler mood came over him.

"I have given her up for her own sake. To her I am dead and buried. Shall I come back to life only to make her wretched—to overshadow her future for the second time? Has experience taught me no wisdom? Oh, better far that I had perished when the little boat went down in the stormy waves off Ischia than to live to be such a coward and a villain as this!

Let her be happy in her own way, whatever that is, and when once I know that she is peaceful in the sunshine of a more dearly treasured love than mine, there are ways enough of passing quietly out of this world in which I have dwelt, no better than a mere disembodied spirit, for the last seven years. She shall be pure and sinless before both God and man—my little Ida—whatever becomes of me!"

When the picnic-party assembled together, just after sunset, to set out upon their homeward way, one of the number was missing.

"Where is Dorrillon?" inquired Mr. Carisforde, who was mentally numbering up the boat-loads.

James, the servant, turning round from his task of packing the silver, glass, and china that had been used in the wagon which was to take them home replied:

"If you please, sir, he has walked home."

"Walked home!" echoed Carisforde. "What, fifteen miles on such a broiling afternoon as this!"

"Yes, sir. I offered to row him myself, or to drive him home. There's plenty of room in the wagon, and I could have gone a little earlier just as well as not; but he said he liked the walk, and I was to say he had just remembered some letters that must be written this evening."

"It's too bad," said Angie Gresham, innocently; while Mr. Cleve observed, dryly:

"I'm very glad I haven't any such pressing correspondence."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A DECLARATION OF LOVE.

PERHAPS Mr. Dorrillon had really some very important letters to write, for when, toward ten o'clock that night, Miss Fairfax came into the library, he was sitting at the desk, with an open portfolio beside him, and his face very pale, with weariness or some other strong motive cause.

Helena started as she saw him; she had not expected to find any one in the library, which was generally deserted at that time in the evening.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dorrillon. Am I disturbing you?"

"Not in the least, Miss Fairfax," he answered, courteously. "Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you. I only came to get a book or two which belong to me."

Mr. Dorrillon gazed earnestly at her. The fresh color had died away from her cheek, and her eyes were dull and heavy.

"Are you ill, Miss Fairfax?" he asked, after a minute's silence.

"No, I'm not ill, only—only—I have told you so much, Mr. Dorrillon, that I may as well tell you the rest. We are going away to-morrow morning."

"Going away?"

He asked no question in words, but his voice implied it, and she answered the mute inquiry.

"Yes; she has rejected Ferdinand."

Mr. Dorrillon was silent. He could not have spoken, had his life depended on the utterance of a single syllable, but Helena interpreted his silence after her own ideas, and went hurriedly on:

"Yes, it is all over now—poor, poor Ferdinand! She was very sweet and gentle, but she told him 'No' resolutely. She should never marry again; she did not love him, though she respected him, and all that sort of thing. We had not dared hope much, and yet—well, it's no use now thinking what might have been. She is the only woman who could have made Ferdinand happy; but even now I can't be as angry with her as I try to be. Perhaps Ferdinand was too precipitate in speaking to her. I told him not to hurry matters too much, but he could not endure the suspense. Men are naturally impatient, I believe," added poor Helena, with a faint smile. "But I have a great deal to do in packing up to-night, and I must not stand here talking. Good-night, Mr. Dorrillon, and good-bye."

She held out her hand. He took it, scarcely knowing what he did.

"Believe me, Miss Fairfax, your brother has my sympathy," he said. "There is no one—no one in all the world who can know better than I how much he has lost."

So Helena Fairfax, marveling at the fervor of his words, went away, and he never saw her more.

When she was gone, Dorrillon rose and paced up and down the library, with a tumult of feelings warring at his heart. He could not analyze or define them; but, first and foremost, he felt the great weight of terror lifted from his life. Her heart was not given away—it might yet be his own. He had stood aside and given his rival a fair chance—now there was no earthly power which should keep him from making one more effort to win the treasure. A new hope had sprung into his breast, a new courage inspired him. Let Reginald Dela-

mere sleep in his quiet grave in the dreary old city of Naples —Frederic Dorrillon should inherit all the happiness which was not destined to be his.

If Ida only loved him! He drew back from the faint chill of doubt and fear which came creeping into his veins; he resolutely turned away from beholding any possibility adverse to his own wishes. Fortune was not to be wooed by craven trembler. He had hesitated long enough. The time for action had come at last.

He drew out his watch and glanced at it. Fifteen minutes past ten; he ground his teeth together to see how late it was. They were all wearied with the unusual fatigue of the day in the woods—would probably have retired early—and he must live through another night in ignorance of his fate. The seven years through which he had passed seemed as nothing to him in comparison with these hours that lay before him.

He rang the bell; it was answered by James.

"Have the ladies all gone upstairs, James?"

"Oh, yes, sir, long ago," answered James, with the air of one who feels himself to be a fully competent witness. "There's been nobody in the drawing-room this half an hour, sir, but Mr. Carisforde, and he's been fast asleep, with his handkerchief pulled over his face, and now he's gone up to his bedroom, and Mrs. Hyde, sir, she's a-straightening up a little bit, just before she puts out the lights. Mrs. Hyde always likes to do such things herself—she's dreadful particular, sir!"

"Very well," answered Dorrillon, rather laconically; "you may go."

James went accordingly, and Dorrillon, with a long, heavy sigh, took out his cigar-case, that universal panacea for all the troubles of mankind, and selected a weed.

"As I can't sleep," he thought, "I may as well have a cigar on the lawn this hot night."

He went out at the eastern door, and, crossing the flower borders, took his way toward a rustic seat which was placed under an elm-tree at no very great distance from the fountain, whose pyramidal shape of diamond rain glimmered deliciously cool in the glow of the sultry August evening.

Overhead the stars were burning with something of the vividness and color one sees in the tropics, and the air, soft and balmy, scarcely stirred the overhanging boughs of the elms, as Frederic Dorrillon stood there silently drinking in the stillness and beauty of the scene, himself quite concealed by

the black circle of shadows in which his form seemed to be absorbed.

Suddenly he started and looked around. The little wire gate which led through a winding avenue of shrubbery to the rose garden was opened, and figures emerged from the green gloom, their light summer dresses floating over the grass as they went.

"Mrs. Hyde is early to-night," said Angie Gresham's voice. "See, the drawing-rooms are already darkened. Are you not coming in, Ida?" for one of the figures had paused close to the edge of the marble basin into which the waters of the fountain fell with a cool, tinkling drip.

"Not just yet, Angie; it is so warm in-doors."

"But you said you were so tired!"

"So I am; and that is the reason I mean to rest out here with the stars and the delicious air and the dew?"

"You will take cold."

"No, I shall not. I never took cold in my life."

"Shall I stay with you, Ida?"

"What for? No, no, little one, I had rather be by myself for awhile. Go in; you will be pale to-morrow, and I shall fall under the ban of Mr. Cleve's most solemn displeasure."

Angie laughed and ran up the portico steps, disappearing into the lighted door-way as swiftly as if she had been gifted with wings instead of little slippered feet, while Ida Delamere remained alone, and apparently immovable — one hand, on which the precious stones sparkled in the starbeams, resting on the rim of the marble basin.

Frederic Dorrillon's heart throbbed high. Fate had placed within his grasp the opportunity for which he had so ardently longed. Ida was near him, and they were alone, and all the sweet, softening influences of nature were marshaled on his side. What strange faint-heartedness was it which, even at this auspicious moment, would fain have bid him stand motionless in the shadow of the elm boughs, and let the tide of his life ebb by, never again to be overtaken? Perhaps it was the natural reaction of the long chain of consequences, either for good or evil, which hung on the issues of that moment; but Frederic Dorrillon was not one to yield to any temporary weakness. He put aside the low-hanging boughs of the tree, and advanced with a calm, determined step into the starlit lawn.

Ida turned round with an involuntary start as the sound of nearing footsteps fell on her ear, but she did not move from her position.

"Mr. Dorrillon, you are out late to-night."

"The sultry atmosphere of the house was too cramped, Mrs. Delamere; I could not breathe there."

"It is deliciously cool and fresh out here."

"Yes, it is."

How strange it seemed for them to stand there exchanging the merest commonplaces, when there was so much hanging on the issues of that hour! Ida stood without speaking, her white dress fluttered idly by the night wind, and her rings glittering in the starlight. Evidently she did not choose to sustain the burden of any further conversation.

Presently Dorrillon spoke again:

"I was hoping for an opportunity of speaking to you this evening, Mrs. Delamere, but the servants told me that you had retired."

"I did go up to my own room, but Angie coaxed me out again for a walk among the roses."

Still she did not ask him why he had wished to see her.

"I understand that Mr. Fairfax leaves us to-morrow morning," he said, quietly.

"Yes."

"You will miss him?"

"Yes."

"You have been friends for some time, I am told?"

"Yes, for several years."

"It strikes me," said Dorrillon, slowly, "that he did a very foolish thing in risking, for the mere possibility of a nearer relation, the surety of friendship such as yours has been. Men are foolish at times—it seems to be a part of their nature."

Ida looked up quickly.

"Mr. Dorrillon!"

"You are surprised at my intimate knowledge of your private affairs. Yes, Mrs. Delamere, I happen to know that Mr. Fairfax has proposed to you, and been refused. But you need not look so startled—the secret is safe with me."

Ida drew herself haughtily up.

"I am not startled, Mr. Dorrillon—it matters little to me whether the secret, as you call it, is safe or not!"

"Have I offended you?"

His voice had changed from an almost defiant accent to one of pleading earnestness. Ida's, too, softened as she replied:

"No! I had no reason for being offended."

"Are you going in?" for she had turned away from the fountain.

"Yes; it is late."

"Stay yet a moment longer. I have not said to you that which it is in my mind to speak."

"What is it, Mr. Dorrillon?"

"Ida," he said, in a low, strangely thrilling voice, "I, too, would risk all that Ferdinand Fairfax has risked and lost. I, too, am rash enough to hazard the certainty of friendship for the mere chance of something else. I love you, Ida, I would fain call you—my wife."

The last words were spoken almost underneath his breath. Ida listened in silence, and for an instant or two the low, monotonous drip of waters was all the sound that was audible between them.

"I love you, Ida," he repeated, slowly and earnestly. "There was a time when I thought I would go away and leave these words unspoken, for Fairfax seemed to have usurped the nearest place to your heart. To-night a new courage and resolve came to me—have I been too rash?"

"No," she said, softly. "A man has the right and privilege of speaking—a woman can only stand still and wait."

"And decide the fiat of destiny with one word. Ida, I am waiting for that word. I am a patient man—you, perhaps, have no idea how patient, but this suspense tries even my trained equanimity. Why do you not answer me?"

"Mr. Dorrillon," she cried, almost passionately, "what shall I say?"

"Say what your heart dictates!"

He stood with folded arms looking down upon her, resisting the strong impulse to take her to his breast—to tell her she *must* love him, if only for all those years of self-repression and endurance through which he had passed. No, he would not bias by word or glance the final decision which was to seal his fate; he would drink the cup in silence, whatever it might be.

"But I can not abide by the dictation of my heart," she said.

She came a step or two nearer him as she spoke, and then paused abruptly.

"Do you love me, Ida?" he asked, still standing with folded arms.

"I must not love any one."

"That is hardly an answer!"

"Mr. Dorrillon, I might love you, if—" She stopped here, her voice seemed to fail her.

"You *might* love me, Ida?"

"If it were free for me to love any one."

"I do not understand you, Ida; your words are an enigma."

"And I can not make them plainer," she wailed.

"Your husband, perhaps—your dead husband—expressed a wish adverse to your forming a second alliance!" said Dorrillon, with a scarcely perceptible accent of bitterness in his tone.

"No—no, it is not that! Oh, if I dared tell you all!"

"Ida, you love me, then?"

For there had been something in the thrilling tremulousness of her voice that brought a sudden rapture into his heart. He advanced toward her, but she shrunk away from him.

"Mr. Dorrillon, I must not listen to such words as these. I am shut out from love and happiness such as are reserved for others more fortunate. I live a life of my own, apart and self-contained. In the name of all that is generous and chivalrous, leave me to my solitude!"

"You have not answered me yet, Ida."

"Is it manly to demand an answer after what I have told you, Mr. Dorrillon?"

"Is it womanly to refuse it? Oh, Ida, my heart's queen! the idol of my soul! I have surely a right to know my fate!"

"You know it already, Mr. Dorrillon."

"Then I am to understand," he said, slowly and haughtily, "that you do not love me?"

"I have not said so, Mr. Dorrillon. Oh, why will you press me so?"

"Well, what is it that you have said? I am waiting patiently."

"I have said, Mr. Dorrillon, that there is a reason why I can not marry."

"And that reason is—"

"I can not tell you: it is a secret which I must never divulge—no, never!"

She leaned against the rim of the fountain, and Mr. Dorrillon could hear the quick, panting breath she drew. How she longed to fold her to his heart—to shelter her within the depths of his love—to comfort her as a husband should comfort his wife!

"Ida, can I not guess at this secret?"

"No," she said, sadly, "you could *never* guess at it."

"Is it an actual barrier between two hearts?"

"Yes, a barrier which can never be surmounted—a dark, wicked thing, whose shadow has darkened my life for years—which shuts out all possibility of the happiness which comes to other women."

"Ida!"

"Do not look at me so, Mr. Dorrillon. Do not speak to me in that tender voice; I can not bear it—no, I can not bear it!"

"Ida, you are weeping."

"If I could weep tears of blood they would hardly express the anguish, the despair, of my heart," she uttered, passionately. "Let me go in, Mr. Dorrillon; I have stood here long enough."

"Am I then answered, Ida?"

"Yes."

"But I do not choose to consider this an answer. You must tell me still more."

"Not to-night, Mr. Dorrillon."

"Not to-night, if you choose that it should be so. But, to-morrow, Ida, you will let me come to you in the library, at ten o'clock! It is an hour at which the room is quire unoccupied. I have much to tell you, and I think you will perhaps take courage to impart to me this mystery at which you hint. Grant me this one favor, Ida, and I will ask no more of you —for the present, at least. You will receive me?"

"Yes, I will."

For, even while she felt within herself the utter uselessness of thus postponing the evil days of final separation, Ida Delamere could not find it in her heart to put away this one last glimpse of happiness!

"I will see him once more," she thought, "and then I will tell him that we must part forever!"

He led her silently to the door, and then turned back.

"You are not coming in, Mr. Dorrillon?"

"No, I shall keep vigil with the stars awhile longer. Good-night, Ida."

"Good-night."

His heart stirred joyously at the soft, trembling manner in which she spoke the two words.

"She loves me," he thought, "she loves me, or she never could have spoken thus. Oh, merciful Heaven! can it be possible that this great gift of happiness is coming to me at last? I am like Jacob, in Holy Writ: I have served seven years for this blessed reward, and now I see it, dimly, yet not unattainable!"

And he turned away, alone with his dream of blessedness, a vision as bright as it was destined to be illusive.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CALLED AWAY.

PALE and trembling, yet conscious through it all of a blissfulness that pervaded her whole being with strange, electric buoyancy, Ida Delamere sunk down into the low easy-chair in her own room and buried her face in her hands.

Mathilde came softly in from the other room.

"Will madame please to undress?"

"Not yet, Mathilde; I am not ready."

Mathilde yawned behind her hand. The evening had not seemed long to her; in truth, and in fact, Mathilde was carrying on a very brisk little *affaire de cœur* with Mr. Perkins, the coachman, who had taken a fancy to her pretty Gascon face, and the musical tone in which she managed to mispronounce most of the words in the English dictionary. But Perkins, devoted swain as he was, could not sit up all night making love to Mathilde, and she had been alone in madame's room since ten o'clock.

"It is after midnight," she hazarded, "and madame has had, to be sure, a very fatiguing day—"

"You need not sit up for me, Mathilde; I can do my hair for myself."

Mathilde retired, after a faint protestation or two that she would wait herself and brush out madame's hair, and Ida was alone.

Alone, and yet she could not fix her mind upon the grave subjects that should have occupied it. He loved her; his heart was all her own; the full joy of this consciousness was sufficient in itself. For a brief while she might revel in this, even though the shadows of destiny closed in upon the future that was so near at hand. Once in her life she had tasted the cup, whose draught was like the elixir of immortality, even should it be dashed from her lips the next moment. He loved her, and that was enough. She let her thoughts wander back upon the hour which had just passed; she conjured up, by aid of the enchanter's wand of love and memory, the starlight, and the drip of the fountain, and his voice sounding in her ear as human tones had never before sounded. All the sweet words were spoken over again, the tender accents dwelt once more upon her ears, her heart answering back to each one of them.

He loved her! Ought that not to be happiness enough for once?

But it was not. The heart, exacting and limitless in its requirements, still keeps demanding more; and even in the first flush of her happiness Ida asked herself what she should tell him on the morrow. Had she been wise to grant this last interview? Had it not been better that they should have parted forever, in the starlight, by the fountain? Ida rose up, passionately throwing back the hair from her throbbing temples with both hands, and walked up and down the room with hurrying footsteps, and cheeks dyed burning red.

"Oh, what have I done," she wailed, in low, broken accents, "that the lot of other women should be denied me? What have I done to be shut out from love and sympathy and human gladness? There is neither right nor justice in it—only fate! Why should the crime of another, in which I had neither hand nor participation, follow me like a Nemesis? Why should I not cast it off?"

And then, with a remembrance of all the consequences, possible and probable, which this would entail, she threw herself on the sofa, her face pressed close to its cushions.

"Oh, no, no! I must not dream of such a thing! I could not go to *him* with the shadow of such an awful crime for a marriage dowry. It has made my married life wretched once; it shall never overcloud my future again! Better to live on alone than to see any face that is dear to me turned away with the horror and loathing which a knowledge of the truth must surely bring. It has seemed very bright, this possibility; but I must put it away from me now and forever. Let it be enough that he, my king and prince among men, has loved me!"

And in the few moments of silence that succeeded—moments in which she neither stirred nor moved, but lay there like a dead person—she dug the grave of this new-born hope and sepulchered it with an anguish that seemed worse than death.

But what should she tell him? Ida tried to form some definite plan, but in vain. She could not tell him the truth—she would not. Let him think what he chose about her, he could form no conjecture that would be equal to the truth. He knew already that she loved him, as well as if her lips had spoken the words—he should know no more.

As her overwearied brain puzzled itself with ever-recurring possibilities and fancies, a faint tap sounded at the door.

"Who is it?"

Ida sprung to her feet, and went to answer the summons. It was Mrs. Hyde, the housekeeper, with a shawl thrown on to hide the lacking elements of her very insufficient toilet.

"What is it, Mrs. Hyde? Is any one ill?"

"No, ma'am; it's a telegram just come, by special messenger, from New York. It's a lucky thing you're up, ma'am. I hated to disturb you, but I thought you ought to have it to-night."

"Yes, certainly, Mrs. Hyde. Sit down a minute."

Going toward the light Ida broke the seal of the yellow envelope, and read these words:

"I am dying—at least, so they tell me, and I must see you while I have yet strength to speak. I have that to tell you which will be worth your while to hear. I do not say come at once, but I say that if you do not come you will repent it to your life's end.

"GIUSEPPE ANTONARDI."

Brief, brusque, almost threatening, Ida read the telegram twice or thrice over before she could assure herself that she fully comprehended its import. Then, pressing her hand to her forehead she tried to think what it was best to do. Of course she must go; there might be tidings of her miserable mother which it was essential she should hear.

Involved as she was in the net-work of this man's plots and intrigues, she could never escape from them; no, not even after death had removed one witness of her reflected disgrace. Let him die; it would be, at least, one leaf torn out of the book of her trials and persecutions. But at all events she must go to him, and at once. Death was a relentless creditor whose claims could never be postponed. Yes, she would go to him.

"Is it of importance, ma'am?" asked Mrs. Hyde, who had watched her young mistress's face with some apprehension.

"Yes—of the greatest. Is the messenger waiting?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, to be sure! I told him to wait on horseback, for there might be an answer."

"You were very thoughtful. There is an answer. I will write it directly."

She took a sheet of paper from her writing-desk and hurriedly wrote on it the words:

"I will come at once.

"IDA DELAMERE."

Directing it, she inclosed the envelope in another superscribed to the telegraph company, and gave it to Mrs. Hyde.

"Come back to me, please, Mrs. Hyde, after you have given the letter to the man."

When Mrs. Hyde returned, her mistress was sitting in the same position in which she had left her. She did not seem to notice the housekeeper's entrance.

"You wished to speak to me, ma'am?" said Mrs. Hyde, after she had coughed gently once or twice behind her hand, without succeeding in attracting Mrs. Delamere's attention. Ida looked up.

"Yes, I wanted to know at what time the first express train to New York leaves New Haven."

"There is one at midnight, ma'am."

"It is past midnight now."

"And another at seven, ma'am."

"That is the one I must take."

Mrs. Hyde looked astonished.

"Are you going away, ma'am? No bad news, I hope?"

"No—yes; I suppose it would be called bad news. I wish to go as quietly and with as little comment as possible."

"Shall you be gone long, ma'am?"

"Not more than a day or so, probably. If you are asked anything about the cause of my absence, you may say it was sudden business."

"But you are not going alone, ma'am?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"You are so young, ma'am, and so inexperienced—if it ain't a liberty, my saying so," apologized the housekeeper.

"I am young, Mrs. Hyde, but I am not inexperienced," said Ida, with a quiet dignity which repressed the good woman's objections at once. "What time is it now?—a quarter to one. Tell Perkins to have the close carriage at the eastern door at four o'clock precisely to drive me over to New Haven."

"And your breakfast, ma'am?"

"You can get me a cup of coffee yourself. I don't want to set the servants gossiping any more than is absolutely necessary, and I shall want nothing else."

"Yes, ma'am. Can I help you in packing?"

"I shall have nothing to pack, and Mathilde will be here."

"Then there is nothing more I can do for you, ma'am, at present?"

"Nothing."

Mrs. Hyde withdrew, and Ida, left to herself, sat down and wrote a hurried note to Mr. Dorrillon.

"I am called unexpectedly away from Beechcliff for a day or two. Will you allow me to postpone our interview until my return? I do not know that I am wise in granting it at all, but as I have promised I will not depart from my word.

"I. D."

"That will do," she thought; "it is cold and brusque, and I feel myself how awkwardly the words were selected, but I have neither time nor inclination now to study the graces of rhetoric. If he does not like it—" but then, in the midst of her perplexity and annoyance a soft, shy smile hovered around her lips. She knew too well to confess it, even to herself, that the brief phrases she had written would be liked whatever might be their import.

For he loved her—that was the sweet refrain of all her thoughts—he loved her.

She had swallowed the cup of fragrant and steaming coffee which Mrs. Hyde brought to her room, and the carriage was waiting at the eastern door to convey her to her destination before she went into Mathilde's room.

The French girl was in a sound sleep, her pretty cheek flushed by some pleasant dream as her mistress laid her hand lightly on her arm.

"Mathilde, Mathilde, wake up!"

Mathilde raised herself on one elbow and stared around her as people do when roused suddenly from a deep slumber.

"What is it? Who called me? Madame is dressed—madame is going away. Oh, what has happened?"

"Nothing has happened, Mathilde. I am going on a short journey, that is all."

"And madame has not called me?"

"Because it was not necessary. I do not require your attendance. All I want of you is secrecy and—" She hesitated a second or two.

"Madame may depend on me," promptly interposed Mathilde.

"And," went on Ida, speaking rapidly and in a low voice, "I want you to give this note, with your own hands, to Mr. Dorrillon as soon after breakfast to-morrow as you can, without incurring observation. You understand me, Mathilde?"

"Yes, madame." All that was French in Mathilde's nature came out at the mention of notes which were to be delivered secretly. "Where is the *billet doux!*"

Ida's dark eyebrows contracted.

"It is no *billet doux*, Mathilde—only a necessary communication," she said, sternly.

"I quite understand, madame;" and Mathilde placed it tenderly beneath her pillow. "Madame's wishes shall be followed strictly."

She drew forth the letter again to look at its superscription as her mistress left the room, and murmured sleeply to herself:

"And Monsieur Fairfax—there is no note of farewell to him. But that's the way of the world, up and down, here and there, one wins and another loses, while I— *Grand ciel!* but how sleepy I am!" She closed her eyes and lapsed into a dreamy half somnolence. "I will raise myself up presently and put the little note so precious under my pillow," she thought. "It will be safer there."

And so thinking, Mlle. Mathilde fell fast asleep again.

It was broad daylight when she at length awoke, the sunshine flooding her room with early brightness, and the little *pendule* clock in the room adjoining striking seven.

The first thought was that it was time to rise and prepare her mistress's shower-bath; the second, a remembrance that Mrs. Delamere had visited her room in the gray dawn, shawled and veiled and dressed as if for a journey; the third, a consciousness of some charge impressed upon her mind—the letter for Mr. Dorrillion.

She felt under her pillow. It was not there.

"How clumsy of me!" thought Mathilde. "I have dropped it among the bedclothes—but I certainly remember putting it under the pillow."

She sprung out of bed and shook out the clothing—there was no note there. A candle stood on the table, burning down into its socket—the candle Ida had left there the night before. Mathilde looked into the silver rim with eyes of terror, to see if perhaps there might be flakes of ashes there.

"And I," she mused, in apprehension, "I am such a log when I sleep—I may have dropped it directly into the candle, but praise be to the saints, there are no ashes and no smell of burned paper. *Prenez bon courage*—it had no legs and could not run away—it must be here somewhere!"

But, notwithstanding Mathilde's self-consolation, the note appeared to have vanished as effectually as if it were gifted with what Mathilde was sure it had not—legs. She searched her room, her own night garments, the bed-clothes, in vain.

"*Mon Dieu*," thought the French girl, "what shall I do?

Madame will never forgive me—as for monsieur, he would tear me into pieces if he did but know. It is but to put a brave face upon it—all will be right. Ten to one madame will never discover that the note was not delivered, and if she does, why," with an inimitable shrug of the shoulders, "to have forgotten is not a capital crime!"

It was fortunate that Mlle. Mathilde had an elastic conscience.

CHAPTER XL.

DISAPPOINTED.

FREDERIC DORRILLON slept very little that August night, but his thoughts and aspirations were sweeter and more refreshing to him than any slumbers could have been. Even in the brief interval of unconsciousness that descended upon his eyelids, after he had turned and tossed long upon his pillow, the enigmatical words that Ida had spoken haunted his broken and disconnected dreams, and the fountain and the starlight, and the song of summer insects mingled fantastically with grave, deeper thoughts!

It was a little more than sunrise when he rose, cooling his heated brow with iced water, and trying to quiet his reflections by looking out upon the fresh morning landscape, where the short grass of the lawn was sparkling with dew-drops, and the crescent-shaped heads of dazzling petunias, verbenas, and scarlet geraniums were glowing like rainbows penciled on the earth.

"How shall I pass the time away until ten o'clock?" was his first thought; and he added, half smiling at himself: "I am getting as impatient as a school-boy."

Yet there were the four or five long hours still to be existed through. That was a fact as undeniable as it was disagreeable.

"I can not meet all those chattering magpies down-stairs, and discuss the weather, the chances for a shower, and the latest item of news in the morning papers, as if my destiny were not hanging on the thread of the coming hours," he said, impatiently, to himself. "I will go for a walk in the woods; there is nothing like bodily exercise for restraining a mind that is preternaturally active."

Mrs. Hyde was in the breakfast-room as he passed its open door.

"You are going for a walk, sir?"

"Yes; the morning is so fine that I can not remain indoors," was the good-humored response.

"You had better have a cup of coffee before you go, Mr. Dorrillon," said the prudent-minded housekeeper. "I have it here in the urn, if you'll just let me pour it out. It's never healthy, sir, taking them long walks on an empty stomach. You young folks never think of dyspepsia until it's fairly got hold of you."

"If you really think there is any danger of such an awful fate as that," said Dorrillon, gravely, "I'll come and take your prescription."

He gratified Mrs. Hyde by drinking a full cup of the beverage for whose manufacture she was justly renowned, and breaking off half a crispy French roll, before he went on his way.

"A very nice gentleman that, if he is half Scotch," thought Mrs. Hyde. "There ain't many like him. I've thought once or twice lately that my young lady fancied him a bit. I'm sure she should have my blessing, if that was all that was wanted."

Meanwhile, Frederic Dorrillon, quite unconscious of the favorable sentiments conceived toward him by Mrs. Hyde, was plunging into the depths of the woods toward the river shore.

"I need not return now, until time to see *her*," he thought. "I had rather be alone with these old forest trees, and the rush of the river, and my own thoughts, than to answer questions in which I am not interested, and listen to remarks that I can't take the trouble to comprehend at the Beechcliff breakfast-table. *She* will know how to interpret my absence."

He kept his resolve, and it was a quarter of ten when he ascended the broad stairway to his own room at Beechcliff. There was no one in the hall but Mr. Carisforde, the Bridgeport banker, who lay lazily outstretched on a bamboo settee fancying that he was reading.

"Halloo, Dorrillon!" he called out in an injured tone of voice. "You've been fishing again. Why didn't you tell me? You knew I wanted to go!"

"I have not been fishing," returned Mr. Dorrillon, "in the first place; and, in the second, I wanted no companionship. Don't look so aggrieved, Carisforde. Are there never any times when you prefer the society of yourself alone?"

Mr. Carisforde shook his head; there was no preponderance of the ideal in his nature, and he could not comprehend what he called "freaks" in others.

Ten minutes afterward Dorrillon descended the stairs and took his way toward the library.

"Don't you want to see the morning papers?" called Carisforde after him. "There's a capital summary of the debates in the House of Parliament, and red-hot editorial about international responsibility."

"Thanks—not just at present."

Mr. Carisforde lifted up his head with some idea of following his friend into the library, but it required too much resolution to leave his easy, reclining posture, with the sofa pillow under his shoulders, and a view, through the wide-open doors, of the green shrubberies without, so Mr. Dorrillon escaped for the nonce.

"He's an unsociable kind of fellow, too," thought Carisforde; "one never knows how to take him. I'm well off here, and here I'll stay till some one comes along to talk over the money article with me. I wonder how the thermometer is? I've an idea this is the hottest day of the season."

The library was cool and quiet, with closed Venetian slats, and the vases newly filled with flowers, while the whole room was redolent with that pleasant, indescribable odor of books which so often pervades the room where they are kept. Dorrillon threw himself into the leathern-covered easy-chair, then rose up again impatiently. It was quite impossible to sit still and listen to the ticking of the tall, black marble clock, and the distant sound of the drawing-room piano, where Angie Gresham was singing simple little ballads to Mr. Waverley Cleve, in whose ears they were doubtless preferable to the sweetest Italian bravura ever warbled by Parepa. Quite impossible—and Mr. Dorrillon began to walk slowly up and down the room, ever and anon comparing his watch with the clock, and wondering if ever the moments lagged so slowly before.

Ten o'clock—and no light footstep at the door; Ida was rather punctual in her habits, but women, as a rule, were seldom very methodical, and he would allow her at least fifteen minutes' grace.

Hush! there was an elastic footfall, but it went by the door—it was only Mrs. Henley Forsyth going to get some white moss roses for her hair—and then he recognized Mrs. Hyde's elephantine tread, and that of James the footman, carrying a basket of fruit from the grapery to the dining-room. Would she never come?

Ten minutes after ten—Mr. Dorrillon was growing impatient now, despite his resolution about the fifteen minutes' grace.

Perhaps, however, she was detained by some prosy female edition of Mr. Carisforde.

He only wished he had the woman by the throat, whoever she was—and another fevered spasm of striding up and down the room followed.

Fifteen minutes past—and no Ida still. Dorrillon sat down and resolutely took up a book; but if it had been written in the Chaldee language it would have been equally profitable to him. His eyes skimmed along the sentences, telegraphing no report whatever to his brain, and presently he laid it aside, impatiently.

Half past ten—the clock struck the half hour with a shrill sound, as if some tiny elf hidden within the black marble case were laughing at his discomfiture. He rang the bell; in a minute or two James came into the room.

"Where is Mrs. Delamere?—in the gardens or in her own room?"

"She ain't anywhere, sir," said James, somewhat taken by surprise, for he forgot that Mr. Dorrillon had not been one of the guests who, at the breakfast-table, had marveled over Mrs. Delamere's unusual absence. "Leastways, sir, she ain't at Beechcliff."

"Not at Beechcliff?"

"No, sir; she went away early this morning."

"Went where?"

"I don't know, sir."

"And when is she to return?"

"I can't say."

"Who does know anything about it?"

"I don't know, sir," returned James, sorely perplexed by this cannonade of questions. "Mrs. Hyde, she don't know more'n I know—may be," he added, unconsciously heaping Ossa upon Pelion of his tautology, "Miss Matildy, as is madame's own maid, knows."

"Send her to me at once."

"Yes, sir."

James went whistling up the stairs. Mathilde was no favorite of his, partly because she preferred Perkins's attentions to his, and partly because she laughed at him and called him "clumsy," and he did not specially relish an errand to her.

The French girl was sitting in her mistress's anteroom, fluting laces, with the door half-way open, singing some little sentimental ballad to herself.

"Matildy," called James, without taking the trouble to do

more than peer through the balusters, "you're wanted in the library."

"Who wants me?"

"A young gentleman—so there!"

"I will not believe you," said Mathilde, composedly pulling out a piece of lace.

"It's so," pleaded James. "I ain't a-chaffin' of you this time, honor bright!"

"Ah!" said Mathilde; "I comprehend you, James. You have deceived me the times without end. I shall not myself disturb."

"'Tain't Perkins," said James, with a grin; "he's out at the stables, smokin' his pipe, and watching the stable-boys do nothin' at all."

"It is no person," said Mathilde. "My fluting scissors, they are too hot!" and she twirled her little finger piteously.

"Come—ain't you a-goin'?"

"No—to be sure, no!"

"Very well," said James, turning away, "I'll tell Mr. Dorrillon so."

"Mr. Dorrillon!" Mathilde jumped to her feet at once. "Why did you not say at once that it was Mr. Dorrillon? What wants he?"

"You, I s'pose. He asked for madame's maid!"

"Oh, mercy!" ejaculated Mathilde, scattering her laces recklessly around her. "Tell him I will be with him this instant."

"You needn't be in such a hurry," said James, maliciously. "He ain't going to make love to you."

"You think one is only conscious of love-making, you Americans!" said Mathilde, contemptuously. "Go and talk nonsense to Maria: I have not the wish to listen to it!"

"Not a bad piece of advice, if a fellow had the time to listen to it," said James, as he took himself off. "She'll be down directly, sir!" he said to Mr. Dorrillon, and then vanished.

Presently Mathilde entered, in a blue muslin dress, a great deal more fanciful and expressive than any that poor Angie Gresham wore, and a jaunty white apron, trimmed all around with delicate ruffles.

"Did monsieur wish to speak to me?" she questioned, demurely, looking, as James might have said, "as if butter wouldn't melt in her mouth."

"Where is Mrs. Delamere?" inquired Dorrillon, abruptly.

"Gone, monsieur."

"Whither?"

Mathilde shook her head—she did not know. Madame had not told her.

"Do you know when she will return?"

"No, monsieur."

"This is very strange," enunciated Dorrillon, biting his lip.

"Yes, monsieur," Mathilde answered, with downcast eyelids, "it *is* strange."

"Did she—did she leave no note or message for me?"

"Did monsieur expect one?"

Mathilde's look of innocent surprise was sufficient of an answer; he turned away, annoyed that he had exposed himself to the comment and wonder of servants.

"That will do, Mathilde," he said, coldly, and the French maid withdrew, internally congratulating herself that she had passed through the dreaded interview without being compelled actually to tell a falsehood.

"A little bit of equivocation is no harm," thought Mathilde, "the priest himself couldn't object to that, when one is really driven to it!"

Meanwhile, Dorrillon stood in the library, his arms folded tightly across his heaving chest, his eyes full of a stern, dangerous light.

"So," he muttered to himself, "she has chosen to avoid this interview by something not very different from flight. Was she so much afraid of me? or was it that she was unwilling to stay and abide the consequences of her own coquetry? She did not love me—she has never loved me—and I have been deceiving myself a second time. Well, I shall learn experience after awhile, and wisdom. Oh, my God! that Thou shouldst allow one human being to be so cruelly at the mercy of another. Thy waves and billows have gone over me, and I am weary of striving against destiny!"

All the morning he remained in the library. Carisforde, lounging in the hall, wondered what on earth Dorrillon could find to busy himself about among those books—people came up and down, their blithe voices floating on the summer air, like echoes from another world from that which surrounded the lonely, heart-broken *solitaire*—and the sunshine ebbed like a sea of gold along the grass on the Beechcliff lawn. When at length he came out, it was with a face as haggard as if he had passed through weeks of illness.

"Halloo, Dorrillon," said Carisforde, as he passed; "I didn't know you were having a fit in there, or making your will, or something else equally disagreeable. You're done up with the hot weather, aren't you? I knew that long walk

wasn't the thing, with the thermometer up in the clouds. Try a little iced claret—it's the most cooling thing a man can take this weather."

Dorrillon muttered some unintelligible reply, and when Mathilde met him on the stairs, on her way down to the upper-servants' lunch, in the housekeeper's room, she started, so pale and worn did he look.

"Monsieur is not well?" she asked, timidly.

"Monsieur is perfectly well. Mathilde, can I depend on you?"

"Perfectly, monsieur."

"I am leaving Beechcliff. Will you give this note to your mistress as soon as she returns?"

"Notes again!" thought Mathilde, as she received the little sealed and folded billet with a generous *douceur* in the shape of a rustling new bank-bill. "Monsieur is too kind—yes, surely, madame will have the note. We shall all be sorry to lose monsieur from Beechcliff."

"Speak for yourself alone, Mathilde," said Dorrillon, almost savagely, as he turned away. Mathilde watched him enter his room with wondering eyes; then she scrutinized the note he had given her carefully before she slipped it into her bosom.

"There shall be no mistake about this," thought Mathilde, "at all events. All the same, I should like much to know what is in it. I hope there is nothing about the other one which he didn't get! On the whole, it is just as well that he is leaving Beechcliff before madame returns. It saves explanations, which might be awkward for a poor girl like me, who meant no harm."

So Mathilde went down-stairs to lunch, with an excellent appetite, and thought no more about the mischief she had unwittingly done.

And, when the nightfall, with its purple and its dew, gathered once more over the lovely shrubberies at Beechcliff, Frederic Dorrillon was miles and miles away on the journey he had commenced. Whither he went, he cared not—it was enough that he was leaving behind him the ashes of a dead hope.

CHAPTER XLI.

GIUSEPPE'S STORY.

THE August heats were pouring down in the narrow, reeking streets of the vicinity commonly called the Five Points, in New York, like an Arab sun reflected from the fierce sands of

the desert, and the big bell of the City Hall clock had just proclaimed the hour of one in the afternoon, when a dark, villainous-looking man, clad in a suit of rusty velveteen which seemed to set the weather entirely at defiance, came down the shaking stairway of a two-story wooden house and took his stand in the door, both hands in his pockets, and a black, stumpy pipe between his yellow teeth.

It was, as we have said, a small house, warped and crooked so that it seemed to stand with one shoulder higher than the other, and tumble-down dormer-windows in the roof. A pawnbroker's shop, surmounted by three balls which had been gilded and glittering once, but were now tarnished and unattractive, occupied the lower story, and a red-eyed old woman, apparently on the *qui vive* for chance custom, was knitting industriously away on the doorstep, with a cat almost as large as herself crouched directly beside her, its sleepy green eyes dilating and expanding by turns. Opposite and all around were groceries, liquor stores, junk shops, markets, all surmounted with the inevitable human hives called tenement houses. Some of the windows held wooden boxes containing miserable stunted plants; some bird-cages and white mice; some, tangled heads thrust out, as if the contemplation of the dirty streets was better than that of the squalor and wretchedness within. Venders of damaged fruit and wilted vegetables drove, bawling through the narrow thoroughfares; fishmen shrieked through tin horns, and dogs barked ineffectually at each new tide of sound, while from the gutters blear-eyed children start up as if they were a natural growth of the foulness and dirt engendered therein.

"How is he?" asked the pawnbroker's grandmother, as she seamed her stocking and scratched her head with a disengaged knitting-needle.

"He ain't no better," growled the man in the door-way. "Ain't nothin' 'll suit him, but I must come down here and look out for somebody as ain't comin', and won't come. Blast it all!" he added, kicking viciously at a lean cur which ran past with a bone in its mouth, "I'm sick of this 'ere business!"

"I don't wonder," said the old Jewess, sympathetically. "I s'pose he's got money!"

"If he hadn't he wouldn't be here," was the rejoinder. "I'd kick him into the streets if he was my wife's brother forty times over. A pretty brother—keepin' away from us, as if we'd had the small-pox, as long as he didn't want nothing of us—we might ha' starved, the whole pack and boodle of us—for all him—and then comin' here to be nussed up the min-

ute he gets his head split in a row down by the river-side. That's nateral affection, that is!"

And the man uttered a contemptuous grunt, with such energy that the black pipe fell out of his mouth, and was with difficulty rescued from breakage.

"Some folks is that way," said the woman, shrugging her shoulders. "Your wife always had a soft heart."

"She'd better keep her soft heart for me and the kids, then," growled the man.

"Does the doctor say he'll die?" asked the Jewess, looking up with a blink of curiosity in her red eyes.

"'Tain't none o' your business, nor mine, neither, what the doctor says," was the ungracious reply. "All I know is, it's three days since he came here, a-turnin' the place topsy-turvy, with his hollerin', and his groanin', and his screechin', and I'm pretty much sick of it."

"I should think so," said the woman. "How did it happen, now? Nina's been so busy, I ain't had a chance to ask her."

"How does most things happen hereabouts? In a row—a gamblin' row—down to one of them furrin' sailor boardin'-houses by the water, to be sure. If they'd killed him, fair and square, I wouldn't ha' said a word; but to bring him here to keep us all in a stew three mortal days, it's what I call mean!"

"So it is," assented the Jewess, rising to go in, as a meager, half-grown boy advanced toward her sanctum with the end of a pair of tongs sticking out of a newspaper wrapping, a sure token of the distress or perverted appetites of his miserable home.

"Is it the tongs you've brought Barney, dear? Sure, they'll make an elegant set, with the broken fender and Widow Summers's brass-topped poker!"

At the same moment a woman's footstep came down the stairs, and a worn, haggard face, framed in big bands of dead-black hair, looked over the shoulder of the man in the doorway.

"She ain't comin' yet, is she, Chris?"

She spoke with a slightly foreign accent, and pushed aside her hair with a weary motion.

"No—she ain't!"

"Is it late, Chris?"

"Where's your ears? ain't the clock just struck one?"

"I've had other things to think of beside watching for the clock, Chris. He can't last long. Poor Giuseppe!"

"He'll last long enough to wear us all out, you'll find," snarled the man.

"He's the only relation I've got in the world," pleaded his wife.

"And a good thing it is; if you'd had many of the same sort, I'd emigrate to Australia—hanged if I wouldn't!"

"He never has troubled us much," said the wife, with a slightly resentful accent in her voice.

"No; 'cause he's never wanted nothin' of us. I don't believe in no relations—I don't."

"He's my brother, all the same," said Nina, "and I'll take care of him, husband or no husband; so I tell you."

"Humph!" grunted the man. "O' course you will—I never doubted that! Get back into the house with you, Nina!"

"But you'll stay here and watch?"

"'Twon't be for any love of him—*that* you may understand!" was the gruff answer.

"For my sake, Chris!" she pleaded.

"Go in with you, I say!" ejaculated the man, turning upon her with such a volley of imprecations that she stayed to hear no more.

Dashing up the creaking stairway, worn slanting by the tread of the footsteps of half a century, she opened the door and softly glided into the back room, used apparently for bedroom, kitchen, and dwelling-room for the whole family, and dirty and crowded to suffocation. Two grimy-faced, black-eyed children sat on the floor, fighting over a broken piece of gayly colored crockery; a tall, bold-looking young woman sat at a rattling sewing-machine, stitching away at a pile of tailor's shopwork which lay on the floor beside her, and a boy was asleep in a rocking-chair, a worn newspaper in his hand, while on a bed in the further corner of the room, tossing to and fro and uttering now and then low, murmuring sounds which might have been words or might have been mere ejaculations of pain and uneasiness, lay Giuseppe Antonardi, waiting for the end of all things.

He opened wide his half-closed eyes as the Italian-born woman entered.

"Has she come?" he asked, eagerly.

"No," was the answer, spoken in a soothing, regretful tone.

"*Madre di Dio!* and the time grows so short. Is it night yet?"

"No, Giuseppe, it has only just struck one."

"The little bag of black velvet, is it safe where you put it under the pillow?"

"No one has touched it, Giuseppe."

"Let me see it," he sharply demanded.

Bending low the woman slipped her arms between the straw bed and the sacking and drew out a little bag of black velvet worked in tarnished gold thread.

"Here it is, Giuseppe," she said.

"Give it to me in my own hand," he cried, breathlessly. "Mind, Ninetta, it is for *her* if she should come too late. For her, and tell her—but you *can't* tell her! Nobody can tell her but me—and I am going!"

"Take another drink of this, Giuseppe," said his sister, holding a battered tin cup to his lips. "The doctor said you wasn't to tire yourself out."

"He is right," murmured Giuseppe, faintly. "I shall need all my strength when *she* comes!"

"She'll be here pretty soon," said Nina. "Better try and sleep."

"I shall not sleep again until I sleep forever," he answered, in a hollow tone, as if talking to himself. "That noise—it troubles me—it is like water flowing, flowing away from me!"

Nina made a gesture to the bold-eyed girl to stop her work.

"Take it down to Mary Egan's room," she whispered, "and take the children with you, Elena. He can't last long now—and it's hard he shouldn't die in peace."

The girl silently obeyed, and tapping the sleeping boy on the shoulder beckoned to him to follow her, so that the room was left in silence, save for the occasional upward-borne echoes of the noisy world of the streets without.

Giuseppe Antonardi lay staring at the ceiling with lips that worked ceaselessly and tremulous fingers clutching at the bed-clothes.

"To think that it should end thus!" he muttered once. "I thought of everything, but I never thought of this! Well—a man can't live forever!" and then his voice died away into silence.

He lay apparently quite quiescent for some minutes, then raised himself on his elbows, staring wildly around.

"She is coming! I hear her! She is coming!" he exclaimed.

"Lie down, Giuseppe," soothed his sister; "it's only the children on the stairs."

But the next moment the door of the miserable apartment opened, and Ida Delamere stood on the threshold, pale and

travel-worn, a dark shawl wrapped round her slender form, and a heavy veil thrown back from her face.

"Signora Ida!" he faltered, with a gesture, as if he would have shrunk out of her sight.

"I have come, Giuseppe," she answered, advancing slowly to his bedside, and seating herself in the chair that the Italian woman had drawn forward for her.

"Yes," he assented, slowly, "yes, it is well. I could not have died in peace, unless—unless—the black velvet bag, Ninetta—where is it?"

Nina picked up the bag from the place where it had fallen on the pillow, close by his hand, and placed it once more in his cold palm.

"Here it is, Giuseppe."

"Then go, Ninetta—leave me alone a little while with the signora. You are not afraid?" with a glance at Ida.

"No," she answered, quietly. "I am not afraid. Why should I be?"

"Surely—why should you be?" he slowly repeated. "It is the living who wreak their vengeance on one another. A dying man can harm no one—and I am a dying man!"

"Why do you not send for a priest?" she asked, pityingly, as a spasm of pain contracted his features.

"A priest!" he echoed, bitterly. "I have lived without a priest, and I do not need the help of one to die. I am no puling child or chattering old woman; yet, to please Ninetta, I shall let her send for a priest by and by, but not now."

"What is it that you wished to say to me, Giuseppe?" said Ida, breaking the ice at once, for she felt that she could not long endure delay. Neither had the man before her many moments in which to shrive his parting soul.

"Much, signora—much. But, first, you must promise me forgiveness for all!"

"For what?" she asked.

"For everything!" he answered, emphatically.

"It is promised," she said, with a look of compassion. For who could cherish thoughts of bitterness or revenge toward one who stood on the awful verge of the unseen world? Whatever crimes he had committed, whatever weight of sin lay on his soul, he was dying now, and the ægis of divine mercy, faintly reflected on human souls, shielded it all.

"I am glad you have promised that," he said, slowly. "It would have been harder for you to have spoken the words, after you have heard it—after I have told you—"

"Told me what?"

"That I have deceived you all your life long."

"I have never believed you to be true, Giuseppe," she said, bitterly. "It is no news that you have deceived me, but—I do not comprehend you—Madame Avioli is not my mother?"

A sudden gleam of light seemed to flash through the dark mystery of her fate—a possibility of escape which made her heart beat faster and more unevenly.

"Madame Avioli *is* your mother," Giuseppe answered, slowly.

Ida's clasped hands fell to her knee—the transient gleam was fading out in darkness.

"Listen, Mrs. Delamere," said Giuseppe. "Madame Avioli is your mother, but it was not her hand that dealt the fatal blow to Pierre L'Echelle's heart. She is as innocent as a babe—as pure as a flower. Moreover, she never knew that aught like the shadow of suspicion of so foul a crime rested on her name. How should she?"

"My mother," murmured Ida, with a new sweetness in the word—a sudden thrill of joy, like a sepulchered hope rising up from the sealed stone of death; "my mother, and I have repulsed her so cruelly. Oh, what will she think of me? How can she comprehend my conduct?"

"You forget, signora, that she never knew you were her child, she could not deem you undutiful," explained Giuseppe, slowly.

"True, true!" exclaimed Ida. "Thank Heaven for that at least; her heart has been spared a double rending. Oh, my mother—my poor mother! But how—why—"

"Patience, Signora Ida, and I will tell you all, if only—"

"One thing first, Giuseppe. If it were not she, who—who murdered Pierre L'Echelle—who was it?"

"It was I!"

"You, Giuseppe?"

"Ah, you may well shrink away from me in horror and dismay," he said, in low, deep accents. "I am the murderer—his blood is on my hands. Nor do I regret it!"

"Oh, Giuseppe!" she shuddered, "this is too horrible!"

"I hated the man," said Giuseppe, with a baleful glitter in the eyes that were already dim and glazed. "I hated him, and I murdered him. Justice can not reach me now. Death will be beforehand with the law. Do you ask me why I cherished the bitter hate? I will tell you, Signora Ida! He had treated me like a dog always. I would have been faithful—nay, I might even have learned to love him, for there is somewhat of good in every human soul, even mine, Signora Ida;

but he struck me down like a dog one night because I had erred in carrying out some order that he had given. From that moment I vowed to be revenged; and I carried the vow in my heart, as only an Italian can do. He was generous at times, he was even liberal—but he never was kind. I need not tell you all that tended to strengthen my resolve, and add evil weight to the vow I had registered. You remembered Pierre L'Echelle; you can not wonder that one who was exposed to the constant fury of his ill-temper and changing moods should weary of them! Well, Signora Ida, you can not have forgotten the night the old priest came from the country to take you away?"

"I remember it well," said Ida, in a low voice. How all the past seemed to rise up before her like the spectral figures in a dim phantasmagoria! How strangely the *is* and *was* blended at the death-bed of Giuseppe Antonardi!

"My heart was sore and bitter toward him then. Moreover, I knew that he had jewels of great value with him—the Adenham diamonds. I have not time to tell you of them now, but some day you will learn their history. Remember the Adenham diamonds. We were staying there to see you off. My master had good reason for keeping his eye on you, Signora Ida; and even after you supposed he had left you, he stayed on quietly, to make sure that you were safely on the way to your new home. It was not that he loved you—I don't think he ever loved a human creature in his life—but it was his interest. Your mother was at the same hotel that night."

"My mother—yes, you told me so."

"Your mother, Signora Ida. What singular freak of chance or destiny sent her thither I know not, but she was there. So much of the story I told you years ago was true. Fate weaves her web strangely, and it so happened that your mother, passing through the hotel corridors, saw her brother, Pierre L'Echelle, through an open door. I know not how it happened, for I was on the watch all the while. It seemed as if the dial of destiny lay uncovered before my eyes. I was committing no crime; I was simply the instrument of a higher fate."

"Go on, Giuseppe," urged Ida.

"They talked together long and earnestly. I could hear some words from my lurking-place, others I could not. She was begging and praying of him to return her child to her. I think the piteous words she used would have melted even my heart, but his was of adamant."

"She did not, then, abandon me—my mother?" gasped Ida, eagerly.

"No—you were taken from her—she would have given the world, had it been hers, to have you back again; but I can not tell you all this," said Giuseppe, with a movement of impatience. "Finally, she left him in despair—and then—Satan entered into my heart, or else the hand of Providence prompted me. I am no casuist to know the difference, and something told me that his hour was come. The door was closed, but I opened it softly. I had learned his own cat-like movements from him, and I was a worthy scholar," added Giuseppe, with a smile of bitter exultation.

"He sat before the fire, just where the light shone and sparkled on the Adenham diamonds, spread out before him, for he was a miser in his way, and loved to gloat over his hoards. I had seen him employed in the same way many a time before, and I had always had this final scene in my mind!"

He was silent for a moment or two, breathing short and fast, and then resumed:

"It was but the work of an instant. My hand was swift, my aim sure—he fell with a groan. I drew the dagger out—it was a foreign toy that belonged to himself and which I had secreted weeks before—and gathered up the gems, casket and all. In my nervousness I let the dagger fall. I searched for it, but could not find it—a step on the hall floor without startled me and I abandoned the search. What more did I want? I had secured the diamonds and I had wrought out my revenge, fully and entirely. As I crept out, still lurking, to the doors where I had seen and heard so much, the passengers were taking coach for the next express train. Your mother was among them. I said to myself that it was well ordered so—if suspicion arose let it fall on the woman whom I could testify had visited his room late at night, who had spoken of revenge, of hatred, in whose veins ran the hot, vindictive blood of the L'Echelles. Who so likely to have committed the crime as she?"

"Monster!" cried Ida, shrinking away from him, but Giuseppe seemed scarcely to heed her as he went on with the details of his strange story.

"I smiled to myself as I thought of the murdered man lying in his blood, and the building full of life and motion and bustle around him, so unconscious of the death that was stiffening in their midst. Such, I said, was human justice. When I got to my room which was close by, I washed away

the stains from my hands and sat down to reflect. One would think the brain would be dizzy and bewildered at such a time, but mine never was clearer. *Bene*—what is the use of lingering over the old forgotten story. The inquest followed—you remember it well. You were a child, but you were a child who noted and observed things. No suspicion fell on me, the faithful, heart-broken servant, consequently it was not necessary to fabricate any lie to avert evil consequences. I assumed the burial expenses; it was not wise to court too much inquiry or bring about legal investigations. And I—I was so devoted a retainer. The jury were melted, some of them, to tears. *Bah!* what a humbug this vaunted human nature is!"

"Giuseppe, no more of this," said Ida, authoritatively. "It is no time for you to assume a tone like this!"

"Time—time," repeated Giuseppe, as if he had hardly comprehended her. "Yes, it is growing short, but I have little more to tell. I did not see you again for nearly six years—where would have been the use? You were poor—friendless!"

"Not friendless, Giuseppe!" she interrupted, the color rising to her cheeks.

"Friendless as far as your protectors could do me aught of good; moreover, I had lost all trace of your mother. With every knowledge of your history and whereabouts I could have extracted any amount of money from her; it would have been a mint for me, but she seemed to have disappeared totally. I could not even ascertain if she was dead or living, although my search was long and faithful. I had the diamonds unset—we Italians have always plenty of friends to help us in any such little job—and I sold them one by one, as opportunity offered. I might have grown rich on them if I had not contracted the ruinous habit of risking little for much—the habit that men call gambling. Luck did not look favorably on me. I lost, and lost, without one redeeming glimpse of future results. When I accidentally saw you in Paris, I was reduced to poverty—almost to begging and rags. People are divided into two classes—the wolves and the lambs. One prey, the other is preyed upon. What would you have? It was not my fault that I was a wolf! We are not our own masters, and I must live some way. So, Signora Ida, I relied upon you. I told you an ingenious story—you believed it. It was a lie, but it served my purpose as well as if it had been the gospel truth."

"How could you have been so cruel, Giuseppe?" shuddered Ida, as she remembered the dark train of consequences which had followed upon his falsity.

"Cruel! What was I to do? I could not starve, signora!

One can not be fastidious when one is cold and hungry. Well, about that time I saw Madame Avioli herself—your mother. I could extort nothing from her—I had no hold on her, and I cursed myself bitterly that it was so. My interest was now to keep you two apart, and I did so, not unskillfully. Was there anything more to tell? Stay, signora; you have had reason to hate me, yet you have not been unkind to me. There have been times when, if I had a conscience, it would have pricked me. I always meant to tell you this some time—some time when luck befriended me, and I was able to live without your help. I could have trusted you not to betray the murder, I think; but the time never came until now."

He fumbled at the clasp of the black velvet bag, and drew out a little pearl cross, wrapped in two or three different papers—a tiny thing, set in gold, with a slender gold chain attached to it, and laid it in Ida's hand.

"If ever you see your mother again," he said—"she whom the world calls the Countess Avioli, but whom I knew as Beatrice L'Echelle—give her this cross. She will know it well; I took it from her baby's neck the last night she saw it."

"From my neck?" asked Ida.

"Yes, Signora Ida, from your neck."

Ida sat musing with quickened pulses on Giuseppe's words. "If ever she saw her mother again!" Until that moment the new, glad certainty of nestling to her mother's heart had never been marred by the mere shadow of a doubt; now a dark dread crept into her soul. "If ever!" Oh, surely, surely God would never, in His infinite mercy, lift the cloud of separation from their hearts only to let it fall again darker and denser than before! She had wounded her mother cruelly and relentlessly; it was her own loving hand which must pour the balm of a daughter's tenderness into the wound. She had been so alone all her life—she had so unutterably pined for the sweet name of mother. Was it to be but an empty, hollow-sounding word, after all?

"Giuseppe," she said, slowly and gravely, "you have done me a cruel wrong—a wrong that you can never set right again. For—" As she spoke she remembered Reginald Delamere's broken heart and early doom—the estrangement that, through the agency of Giuseppe Antonardi, had risen up between herself and her young husband. "But I have promised to forgive you, nor do I recall the promise. May God be merciful to you, His erring creature!"

Giuseppe looked at her with dreamy, bewildered eyes.

"It was murder," he said, in a scarcely audible tone;

"murder, but he provoked it himself. Did he not strike me—me, an Italian, with free blood in my veins, and not a slave!"

"Giuseppe," pleaded Ida, leaning over his couch with the pearl cross in her hands, "try to forget all that. Try only to remember your prayers—your entreaties to the great God at whose bar you will stand so soon."

For his face had grown strangely drawn and haggard, and the ash-gray hue of the corpse was already suffusing his forehead, while the lids drooped heavily over his glassy eyes.

"Giuseppe, shall I call the woman and the priest?"

There was no answer, and Ida, now terrified lest she should be alone in the room with death, sprung to the door, and, opening it, called aloud for help.

The summons was at once answered. Nina, who was rocking herself to and fro in the hall crying softly—for she had a warm and loyal heart, this poor Italian woman, although she had not not seen her one brother for years, and had been almost an outcast from his affection—rose up immediately and ran into the room, while the good old Catholic priest, summoned from an adjoining apartment—where he was nodding over his book—for he had been up all night with other departing souls, joined her presently.

"You'd better step in here, miss, and sit down a bit," said Eleanor, the bold-faced girl of the sewing-machine, who stood leaning against the door-way.

But Mrs. Delamere shook her head; she was pallid and trembling, and felt that she could endure no more.

"No," she said; "you are a relative of his?" with a motion of her head toward the adjoining room.

"He's my uncle, miss—mother's brother. Mother was born in Italy, but father, he is an Irishman."

"Here is money," said Ida, hastily emptying the contents of her purse into the hands which Eleanor stretched forth with vulture-like avidity. "Tell your mother to spend it for his burial expenses. He was a servant of mine for years!"

Eleanor thought it quite unnecessary to mention to the liberally disposed young lady that "Uncle Giuseppe," as she had been taught to call the man who was dying upstairs, was a man of not inconsiderable property.

Money always came convenient in a family like theirs, and to refuse it—no matter on what ground it was offered—Miss Eleanor considered an act of absolute idiocy.

"Thank ye kindly, miss," she said, dropping an abrupt

sort of courtesy and pocketing the money. "I'll be sure to tell her."

And then, by way of relieving her overcharged feelings, she gave a brisk box on the ear to the smallest of the two children, who had disagreed on the subject of broken crockery, and who was now engaged in a scuffle over a kitten, and bade the elder one "sit down and be quiet, at least until poor Uncle Giuseppe could die in peace."

At the same moment a crooked, bent old woman, so decrepit with years that she could hardly hobble, put her hand coaxingly on Ida's shoulder.

"'Tain't the young as needs money, dearie; it's the old and feeble, such as me. You've got a bonny face, little rose—and, I'll be bound, a good heart, too! Give *me* a little of the money, and I'll engage you'll never miss it."

Ida turned and recognized, with a shudder, in the deformed hag before her, mouthing and toothless, and wrinkled like a piece of dried leather, the same old crone who years before had sat before the gypsy fire in the Deepdale woods and torn the bracelets from her arms and the shining gold necklace from her throat in her insatiable greed for gold.

Ida's memory for faces was good, and she knew that she was not mistaken in the identity, although the old woman evidently had no idea who she was. The smell of the autumn woods, the crackling of the huge wood fire, even the song of insects in the distance, all seemed to rise up before her once again, and with it the sick feeling of fear which had thrilled her heart at the touch of those talon-like fingers. She put money into the yellow palm, and the old woman stepped back, mumbling her thanks and blessings, to make way for the priest, who came out of the room beyond at the same moment.

"Is he dead?" asked Ida, looking up into the mild face of the ecclesiastic.

"He is gone, my daughter," was the gentle reply; "and may the blessed saints have mercy on his soul—a dark and wicked man, without even the redeeming virtue of faith."

Ida descended the stairs, feeling as if the close and sultry atmosphere must suffocate her, and entered the carriage, which, surrounded by a swarm of children, was waiting at the door.

"Where to, ma'am?" asked the driver, as he descended to close the door.

"Drive to the New Haven depot," was the answer.

And so Ida Delamere was done forever with Giuseppe Antonardi.

CHAPTER XLII.

HOME TO BEECHCLIFF.

THE soft, misty opal of the summer evening was infolding the bright hills and velvety meadows of the beautiful country surrounding the New York and New Haven Railroad track, and the stars were shining peacefully down from a sky as blue and cloudless as that we read of as belonging only to a southern atmosphere, as Ida Delamere sat with her arm resting on the open window, and looked dreamily out into the enchanted haze of earth and heaven, seeing nothing of the fresh beauty that surrounded her, for her heart and brain were alike full.

Full of a soft, vague happiness that was part real and part anticipatory—a happiness that she would not stop to analyze, content to revel in it just as it was. For the first time in years she felt that she could see a bright, unclouded future before her—that she could close her happy eyes and wait for God's gift of peace and love to come to her. The haunting shadow was gone—the vague sense of guilt and shame had passed out of the world, with the spirit of Giuseppe Antonardi, and the constant shadowing dread that followed her like an unquiet spirit was exorcised at last.

But first and brightest of all her half-formed visions of happiness was that of laying her hand in Frederic Dorrillon's, and saying to him: "The barrier that separated our two hearts has passed away; I am free to love you now."

"I wonder," she thought, with the shy dimples dotting the faintest tracing of a smile around her lips, as she sat watching the wooded landscape sweep by, "what he thought when he read my note? Did it seem very cold and brief to him? I wish I had made it a little gentler. But it don't matter now, I shall see him so soon."

And then Ida relapsed once more into the sweet quietude of contemplation, thinking how ineffable was this new happiness now dawning upon her.

"Yes," she mused, scarcely venturing to syllable the fancies even to herself, "*this* is love. I have so much to think of, but I can only think of him; he fills my whole heart. I look at this new life as I imagine he will see it. I keep imagining to myself what he will say—how he will look. He is my sun, and I am the little planet content to revolve around it, happy because his light shines on me. He is my world—my king—my *love!*"

What would not poor Ferdinand Fairfax have given if Ida could have thought of *him* in these burning phrases—if she could have worshiped him thus! Alas! for every happy heart in life a score are pining unrewarded. We can all strive, but the prize is awarded to only one.

And then, happy in this full consciousness of loving and being loved, Ida's wandering thoughts reverted to another theme—her mother.

"My mother!" she pondered. "How long will it be before I can go and tell her that I am her lost child?" and as she mused she felt the little pearl cross rising and falling with the pulsations of her breast. "She used to love me before—before I threw her love away so heartlessly, as it must have seemed. I wonder if there was no deep, inner instinct of maternal love throbbing in the recesses of her heart when she sought the companionship of the young American girl, cherishing her most among the gay throng of Paris? God's hand guides us by instinct sometimes—yet I refused that love, and repelled her tenderness. Will she love me still? Will she forget the past, and forgive my willful coldness? Mamma," and Ida's heart seemed to expand as she uttered, within herself, the sweet word that it never had been her lot to speak before—the word that means so much, and follows us, like a tender echo, to the very threshold of another world. "Mamma! And we shall go to her together perhaps, Frederic and I—I shall bring to her a son as well as a daughter; she will be twice blessed, yet it will scarce be enough to recompense her for all these years of solitude and loneliness. Poor, poor mamma! And this mystery of my early life—my lonely, neglected girlhood—the isolation that surrounded my girlish years, it will all be explained! I am coming into all my inheritance of love at last, and I shall be the richest heiress that the world ever knew!"

With these happy fancies and meditations filling her mind, it was sacrcely strange that the homeward journey seemed wondrously short to Ida Delamere—that the long country drive, after the train had stopped at New Haven, possessed very little of the tediousness which generally characterized it. Again and again Ida pictured to herself her meeting with Dorrillon, after their brief separation—what she should say to him—how she should express to him all that lay within her heart without overstepping that invisible limit of womanly delicacy which she had learned to reverence still more than do those who grow up encompassed round about with motherly admonitions and the care of innumerable female friends.

Beechcliff was dark and silent when she reached it—save in one window, that of Mrs. Hyde's room, where a solitary light shone out. Well, she could hardly have expected otherwise—it was long after midnight—and yet Ida was inconsistent enough to feel a little pang of regret that Dorrillon had not sat up late into the small hours of the night for the mere possibility of the pleasure of hearing the carriage wheels of her return grate upon the graveled sweep. Mrs. Hyde, carrying a lamp in her hand, answered her summons at the bell-wire.

"Bless and save us, Mrs. Delamere!" she cried, shading her eyes with her hand. "It's you, is it? Welcome back again to Beechcliff, though I didn't look for you quite so soon, to be sure."

"I am sure it seems to me as if I had been away an age," said Ida, wrapping her shawl about her, with a slight shiver, as she passed through the door, held wide open for her by the housekeeper.

"You don't bring us any bad news, I hope?" said Mrs. Hyde, wistfully.

"Oh, no; my news, such as it is, is all good," answered Ida. "Mathilde is upstairs, I suppose?"

"Yes, ma'am; but what will you have before you go up? A cup of chocolate, or a glass of wine, or a little fruit?"

"Nothing, Mrs. Hyde, thank you."

"Then shall I send you up something to your own room?"

"No; I'm not hungry—I dined before I left New York. They are all well at Beechcliff, I suppose?"

"All well, ma'am, thank you."

And Ida ran lightly upstairs to her own room.

There was a dim light burning in the anteroom, and the door communicating with Mathilde's apartment was open. The young damsel was lying, dressed, upon the outside of the bed, evidently intending to rise and disrobe herself when it was too late to expect the possibility of her mistress's return for that night.

But in the meantime she had fallen fast asleep, one round cheek resting on her hand, and her bright, brown hair tumbling all about the pillow.

She started up at the sound of Mrs. Delamere cautiously closing the door and came into the anteroom with French demonstrativeness.

"Madame has then returned. Ah, but it was too good fortune to anticipate; and madame has been away—see, only the one day. Ah, but Beechcliff has been solitary and lonely as a hermit's cave with madame gone. Is there nothing I can

bring madame to eat or to drink? There are white grapes down-stairs, such as were never brought in before this year—and some rolls, most delicious, and with a glass of wine—"

"No, Mathilde, I am not hungry; I could eat nothing. Take my things, and I will go to bed at once."

"Madame is most prudent—the best thing in the world after madame's long journey;" and Mathilde bustled officiously about, patting down the laced linen cambric of the ruffled pillow-cases, and moving chairs hither and thither as if continual motion were a necessity.

"I suppose all the visitors have retired long ago, Mathilde?" said Mrs. Delamere, a little wistfully, as the girl began to brush out her black masses of hair a few minutes later, with qrick, skillful fingers.

"Oh, yes, long since," said Mathilde. "They retired early to-night; the house was *désolee* without madame!"

Ida smiled a little at Mathilde's transparent flattery. Suddenly the girl dropped the brush.

"Oh, I had all but forgotten, madame—a note from Mr. Dorrillon, which he charged me to give you before he went away."

"Before he went away, Mathilde?" exclaimed Ida. "Is he gone from Beechcliff."

"Yes, madame."

"Where?"

"I do not know, madame. His note will perhaps explain."

Mathilde was evidently embarrassed. She turned red and white as she stood fingering the cut-glass scent-bottles on the toilet-table, and avoided her mistress's eyes.

"Where is the note?" asked Ida.

She had grown pale, and a curious sensation of chilliness thrilled through her veins at the tidings spoken by Mathilde. Was it the premonition of coming evil? Was the fair sunshine to be so soon overcast?

CHAPTER XLIII.

GONE.

MATHILDE brought the note—a simple sheet of paper, folded twice, and inclosed in an ordinary white envelope bearing the cipher of "F. D." curiously entwined on its outside. Ida took it into her hand with a pang of foreboding.

"You may go, Mathilde," she said. "I shall want nothing more of you to-night."

The French girl lingered a second or two under pretense of

picking up a glove which had fallen half under the draperies of the toilet-table; but Ida's words of dismissal, spoken a second time, in accents sufficiently sharp and decided to admit of no misconstruction, effectually banished her from the room.

And then, with a long, shuddering breath, Ida advanced toward the clusters of wax-candles which Mathilde had lighted on either side of the dressing-bureau, and broke the seal of Frederic Dorrillon's letter.

It was brief: that she could perceive at the first glance; but as she read on the color faded out of her cheek, and a wild, hunted light glittered in her eyes.

"Mrs. Delamere" (the cruel words seemed like knives piercing into her heart), "I do not know why I humble myself to write to one who cares so little for me. Surely it was not necessary to leave Beechcliff in order to convince me how unacceptable were my attentions. I could have instantly rid you of my presence at one word had you taken the trouble to speak it. Be assured that you will never see me again. I accept the answer implied, and only ask that you will forgive my presumption, and forbear from judging too harshly one who passes forever out of your world with the closing words of this letter. And, although I am now thoroughly convinced that you never can be mine, I still remain,

"Yours, eternally, whether in life or in death,

"FREDERIC DORRILLON."

The note fell from between Ida's nerveless fingers, as she sunk back in one of the low chintz-cushioned chairs; the tidings contained in its curt lines seemed to strike her like a blow. She could scarcely comprehend at first the full meaning contained in them, but kept repeating over and over again to herself, in a vague, purposeless sort of way:

"Gone—gone to leave *me*. And just when the barriers were broken that separated us. Oh, God in heaven! what have I done to deserve this new calamity? Why should Thy vengeance follow me thus?"

Then starting up, she read the note again, and yet a third time, scrutinizing every line, as if she would seek out some hidden meaning that might perchance lurk beneath the mask of ordinary phraseology. But no; cold and cruel as the points of so many glittering daggers, the words stared her in the face.

Pressing her hand to her throbbing forehead, she endeavored to recall to herself the exact tenor of the note she had written to him so short a time ago.

"I am sure—*sure*," she repeated to herself, "that it con-

tained no dismissal; it only requested him to await my return. How could he possibly thus misconstrue my meaning? Or did I, in my haste, word my communication more ambiguously than I intended? No; I am quite certain that I merely asked him to postpone our interview—*not* to excuse it. And he has gone—"

The mere effort of recollection shot a torturing pain through poor Ida's overtasked brain—involuntarily she pressed her hand to her head.

"I wonder if I am going to be ill?" she asked herself. "I wonder if brain fever is like this pain. And if—if I should die. But oh, no, no, I can not die until I have felt my mother's arms around me. Oh, mother, mother, why are you not by my side to help me bear the cruelest of all the blows that has yet fallen on me!"

And Ida burst into a storm of hysterical weeping, which soon brought Mlle. Mathilde to her side, in an odd *dishabille* of cambric, curl papers, and slippers.

"Ah," cried Mathilde, effusively, "madame is then ill. Madame is worn out with her journey. A little quieting draught—a few drops of red lavender and valerian in a glass of water. Nay," as Ida motioned her away, "but madame must!"

And Mrs. Delamere was too wearied and exhausted to resist the maid's well-meaning importunities.

"It is of no use," she said, leaning helplessly back while Mathilde undressed her with deft fingers; "all the opiates in the world could not make me sleep now."

But she was wrong. Hardly had her head touched the pillow when she fell into a deep, heavy slumber, partaking almost of the character of a trance—and as her closed palm relaxed the crumpled letter fell from it upon the floor. Glancing cautiously around the room, Mathilde picked it up, and creeping toward the light, hurriedly read the contents.

"Ah—h—!" she whispered, in accents of measureless content. "Thanks be to the blessed saints, madame will never know from *this* that monsieur did not get her *billet-doux*. And, after all," recurring to the one consolation of her plastic soul, "it was no fault of mine."

And still moving with that cat-like tread of hers, which would not have disturbed a mouse, Mathilde once more dropped the letter precisely where it had fallen from her lady's hand.

"I may as well go to bed now," thought Mlle. Mathilde, with a yawn. "These late hours, *ma foi!* they do not agree

with one's complexion. I shall be yellow and wrinkled before I am forty at this rate."

But, although Mlle. Mathilde felicitated herself upon what she termed her good fortune, she was perhaps a little premature, as the current of our narrative will show.

Ida woke the next morning with that dull, heavy consciousness of some overhanging calamity which we all of us have sustained at some period or other of our lives, and the sight of the crumpled note on the floor instantly supplied the missing clew. Covering her face with her hands, she turned away from the vivid sunshine and fresh, hay-scented air, which seemed to mock at her grief; and yet, at the same time a keen pang of self-reproach pierced her whole nature.

"How ungrateful I am," thought she, "thus to break my heart for a man's love, when God has just bestowed upon me the priceless gift of a mother! And yet—yet the world is desolate to me now. I may learn to be contented in a still, emotionless sort of way—flowers *do* grow in the shade, and precious stones shine far down in the prison deeps of dayless mines—but I never can be happy, in the true meaning of the word, now that *he* has gone and left me!"

Yet she rose up as usual, and breakfasted in her own room, where she was visited by Angie Gresham, all curiosity to know the secret of her friend's sudden and mysterious journey.

"I can not tell you now, Angie dear," Ida said, passing her hand across her forehead. "It was on business—very important business. Some time, darling, I will tell you all about it."

Fortunately, Angie's heart was too full of her own shy, maidenly happiness to be as demonstratively curious as she might otherwise have been, and, to her great relief, Ida was presently left to herself.

But she had enjoyed the luxury of solitude but a short time, when Mrs. Hyde tapped at the door.

"I am sorry to interrupt you, ma'am," said that discreet and useful functionary, "but Esther, the house-maid, has just brought me a note that she found slipped down between the outside frame and the springs of Mademoiselle Mathilde's bed. Mathilde complained that the springs were stiff, so I was having them taken out to be loosened a little, ma'am, and Esther found this note."

"Is it directed to me?" Ida asked, listlessly, without even lifting her eyes from the interior of her writing-desk.

Mrs. Hyde coughed behind her hand.

"No, ma'am, it's not directed to you," said she. "But I think it is in your handwriting."

As she spoke, she laid the sealed letter on the table at Mrs. Delamere's side; and with a thrill of strangely mingled emotions, Ida recognized the note she herself had written to Frederic Dorrillon on the evening of her departure to visit the death-bed of Giuseppe Antonardi.

He never had received it, then. No wonder that he left Beechcliff, cut to the heart by her seeming neglect and contempt; no wonder that he had bid her an eternal farewell. With an instinctive impulse, Ida rose and stretched forth her hands, as if she would call him back from the echoless distance, uttering, in the same instant, a low, yearning cry.

And then, fully comprehending at least how vain and futile was all earthly endeavor to bridge the chasm of fate, she sat down and buried her face in her hands.

"You are not ill, ma'am?" solicitously questioned Mrs. Hyde—and Ida collected herself with an effort.

"No, I am not ill," she answered. "Please send Mathilde to me at once, Mrs. Hyde."

And Mathilde presently came, all unconscious of the storm which was so soon to break upon her devoted head.

"Madame wishes to lay her commands upon me?" she twittered, as usual.

"Mathilde," said Ida, sternly and coldly, with an ominous glitter in her eyes which the girl had never seen before there, "you were bid deliver this letter into Mr. Dorrillon's hand. How dared you disobey me?"

One glance at the sealed letter in her mistress's hand was sufficient proof to Mlle. Mathilde that her perfidy was discovered. She clasped her hands theatrically.

"Madame knows it all, then," cried she. "Madame is aware that I was so unfortunate as to lose the note. How or where, I swear I do not know. Madame gave it to me at night, in the morning it was gone. Alas! alas! it was not my fault. I searched everywhere—I wept—I tore my hair. Who, then, was so base as to steal it from me?"

"No one stole it, Mathilde," said Mrs. Delamere, convinced by the girl's manner that she really was speaking the truth. "Esther found it wedged in between the springs and the frame of your bed. You were culpably careless thus to lose it."

Matihlde burst into tears.

"Ah, madame, pardon—forgive. But what could I do?"

"You could at least have told Mr. Dorrillon that you had

been charged with a note to him, which was lost. You could have confessed your blame to me immediately on my return."

"Ah, madame, how could I know it was so important? I told myself: '*Bon* Mathilde, you have been unfortunate indeed, but perhaps there is no harm done;' and as long as madame did not ask me in so many words—"

"That will do, Mathilde," said Ida, sternly. "Another such act of deceit and treachery as this, and you leave my service forever."

Once more Mathilde broke into sobs.

"I meant it not for treachery, madame," she wailed; "it was but my evil fortune. I should be wretched away from madame."

And, after a fashion, Mathilde spoke the truth. Next to herself, she loved her beautiful young mistress the best of anything in the world.

"You have received a lesson," said Ida, gravely. "Let it be sufficient for all future time."

And Mathilde retreated, whimpering and crying, from her lady's presence, while Ida sat down with contracted brows and absent eyes, to consider what was best to be done. She had been stern and sharp with Mathilde, but, nevertheless, a great weight was lifted from her heart. If this separation were the result, as now appeared, of a mere misunderstanding, perhaps all might yet be well. Identifying herself with Frederic Dorrillon, she could actually feel the pang of heart-break and wounded pride with which he compelled himself to accept the fact of her strange and unaccountable silence—to draw the only possible inference, to write that letter which had smitten down her new-born happiness as the reaper's sickle smites down the tender grain.

"My love, my darling," she murmured to herself, with crimson cheeks and heart pulsing high with vague resolves and half-formed hopes, "I will yet conquer fate, and all shall be well again!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

BAFFLED ONCE MORE.

From the peculiar circumstances in which she had of late years been placed, Ida Delamere had learned, in a great degree, to depend upon herself, and her plans for the future were soon formed. The longing for a mother's love and sympathy, a mother's advice and counsel, in this great emergency of her life, had waxed almost sickening in its strength and in-

tensity, and Ida determined at once to seek out Mme. Avioli. Her address, she knew, could easily be found. From the chance conversation of some of her foreign friends at Beechcliff, she had accidentally learned that the countess was at present living in Grosvenor Square, in London. The exact directions could, of course, be obtained from the London banking-house, with whose silver-headed senior partner Mrs. Delamere was slightly acquainted.

"I will go first to my mother—my mother," Ida repeated, softly, to herself, her lips lingering with loving tenderness upon the syllables that were so new and so sweet to her. "*She* shall tell me what to do, and whither to turn."

And the members of the household at Beechcliff were a second time electrified to learn, the next morning, that their eccentric young hostess had taken an unceremonious leave of them.

"But you are none of you to hasten your departure on that account," said Angie Gresham, coloring like a pretty June rose. "I am to take Ida's place as hostess as long as you can, any of you, be induced to remain."

And so people stayed on, secure of a warm welcome, until the original limit set to their visits had expired. Veritably, there was not much conventional form and ceremony at Beechcliff.

Meantime, Mrs. Delamere, accompanied only by Mathilde, proceeded at once to New York, whence she had resolved to embark in the next steamer that sailed for Europe.

Stopping at a quiet hotel, near one of the pretty parks which form so beautiful a feature of the great city, she immediately instituted inquiries as to the sailing of the steamers, and learned, to her great satisfaction, that one would leave port the next Saturday, at noon. And this was Thursday.

So far, so good. And now to while away the slow hours which lay between herself and the Saturday's noon.

"I will go and take a little walk in the park this afternoon," said she, irresolutely. "The air is fine—it will do me good."

"Shall I accompany madame?" questioned the officious Mathilde.

But Mrs. Delamere shook her head—she felt that she would rather be alone.

She was crossing the street, when a carriage, drawn by two high-stepping and spirited horses, thundered unexpectedly around the corner. Ida uttered a slight scream; but a gentleman who was crossing the street in the opposite direction made

a grasp at the leader's rein just in time to avert an almost certain catastrophe.

"Be a little more careful next time, driver," he said, sternly, to the bewildered Jehu, who had nearly dropped his reins in his consternation, and then, turning to Mrs. Delamere, he doffed his hat to the slight, veiled lady.

"Do not be alarmed, madame," he said. "There is no further danger—and—"

But Ida had thrown up her veil, and advanced eagerly toward him.

"Mr. Dudley!"

He stared in amazement.

"Can it be possible that this is Mrs. Delamere?" cried he. "In town, and at this season of the year?"

In an instant Ida had determined what course to pursue.

"Mr. Dudley," she said, with that quiet, straightforward dignity which can not possibly be misconstrued, "I am very glad I have met you, because I think you can possibly afford me some information regarding one of my late guests—Mr. Dorrillon."

"Dorrillon? Why, of course I can," said Dudley. "Allow me to give you my arm across the street, unless," he added, with a smile, "you particularly wish to get run over. Dorrillon dined with me the day before yesterday."

Ida's heart gave a great leap—the deep crimson blazed into her face.

"Can you give me his address?" she asked, striving to speak calmly. "He left Beechcliff suddenly during my absence, and I fear that I have unintentionally offended him."

"Certainly I can," said Mr. Dudley, with a promptitude of speech that was sweeter than the sweetest music in Ida's ears. "He's at St. Alfonso's in upper Broadway, or was the day before yesterday when I saw him. He didn't seem then to be quite decided in his mind whether he should start for the North Pole to look for Sir John Franklin, or go to investigate the sources of the Nile!"

"Can we not go there at once?" asked Ida, too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice his gay badinage. "I want so much to see him."

"Certainly, if you will accept my escort," answered Mr. Dudley, secretly wondering how Mr. Dorrillon, lucky dog that he was, had contrived so deeply to interest the beautiful mistress of Beechcliff in his behalf.

"Is it far?"

"Half a dozen blocks or so. I'll hail a coupé, if you say so."

"I would rather walk," said Ida. For she felt that swift, continuous motion would afford the best escape-valve for the wildly stirring emotions of her heart. She could scarcely frame coherent answers for the light remarks of Mr. Dudley, so entirely was she preoccupied with her own reflections. Could it, indeed, be possible that this horrible nightmare of suspense and uncertainty was at last drawing to a close—that she should presently stand face to face with Frederic Dorrillon, the lord of her heart, the acknowledged ruler of her destiny?

"You are not well, Mrs. Delamere," said Dudley, pausing on the threshold of the St. Alfonso Hotel, and looking solicitously at her.

"Oh, yes, I am quite well," asnwered Ida, with a start.

"But you are so pale. Have I walked too fast for your strength?"

"No, no!" she cried, half wild with impatience. "I can't bear to creep like a snail. I always walk fast. Oh, do let us make haste!"

Mr. Dudley led her into the ladies' parlor, a somber apartment, rich with gilding, *marqueterie*, and Aubusson carpets, and rang the bell.

"For Mr. Dorrillon," he said, giving his card to the waiter, who presently appeared.

"Mr. Dorrillon? Oh, yes, sah," answered the waiter. "No. 60. Ain't here no longer, sah. Left heah yes'-day. Sailed for Europe in the 'Euterpe,' sah."

"But it can't be possible. He wouldn't go without telling *me!*" cried Dudley, aghast.

"Did, sah," persisted the waiter, showing a double row of faultless African teeth. "One ob our hacks done took him down to the pier. Oh, yes, sah, he's gone, sure enough."

Baffled once more!

Sick, and pale, and faint, Ida drew down her veil, and leaned back in the deep velvet chair in which she was sitting. Dudley turned to her.

"Mrs. Delamere," said he, "I regret this disappointment as deeply as you do" (Ida's lips formed themselves into a bitter smile—how little he knew what he was saying!), "but I can hardly be surprised when I remember how unsettled his plans were when last I saw him, and how moody and dispirited he seemed. In fact, I boldly asked him whether he had met with financial reverses, and advised him, as a friend, unhesitatingly to confide everything to the old admiral."

Ida made no reply. She could not have uttered a consecutive sentence if she had tried just then, and presently Mr. Dudley spoke again:

"Shall I accompany you home?"

Ida shook her head.

"Call a hack, please, for me," she said, in a low, stifled accent.

"Is there nothing further I can do for you?"

"Nothing; thanks!"

Fifteen or twenty minutes afterward Ida Delamere found herself in her own room at the Allington Hotel, with the stunned, torpid sensation of one who has passed through some terrible shock, and escaped with the bare guerdon of life itself.

"Gone—gone!" she cried out aloud, in the bitterness of her extremity, "and I am just too late! Had I been but one day—one little day—earlier, I should have sailed in the same steamer with him—I should have met him face to face! But now a whole continent may divide us before I can reach England. Alas! I feel that I must lay down my sword and spear at last, and leave off striving against fate. I will go to London and rest my poor, tired heart awhile in the sunshine of mother-love, and *she* will, perhaps, counsel me what to do."

And when the "Salvator Rosa" steamed gallantly out of New York Bay the ensuing Saturday, Mrs. Delamere stood upon the deck, with her eyes fixed longingly upon the spires and steeples that receded so steadily from her view.

"Good-bye, dear land of my adoption!" she murmured, softly. "God grant that when I again return to you, I may bring a lighter heart!"

CHAPTER XLV.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

THE roar and tumult of London terminus—how threateningly it seemed to sound on Ida's ears, as, worn and weary from travel, excitement, and lack of sleep, she stepped from the railway carriage upon the platform, leaning on Mathilde's arm. That young person, addressing the cabman and hack-drivers, in a curious medley of French and English, probably induced by the confusion of countries through which she had lately passed, was, however, quite equal to the emergency, and conducted her mistress to a vehicle, whose driver solemnly declared that his was the only hack going in the direction in which lay the quiet family hotel mentioned by Ida, who had

stopped there with good Mme. d'Ancour long ago, at the close of the tour she had taken in her companionship during the first year of her widowhood.

The first year of her widowhood! How long ago it seemed! Ida could almost have believed that she had lived half a century instead of barely the quarter of one.

"Will madame retire at once?" said Mathilde, when they had reached the hotel, and she had persuaded her mistress to drink a cup of very weak tea, and eat an infinitesimal slice of cold tongue, garnished with pale green parsley.

"I suppose so," said Ida; "but I shall not sleep. My head aches so, and everything seems to swim round me."

"Madame is not going to be ill, surely," said Mathilde, apprehensively, as she looked at Mrs. Delamere's pale face, and the blue rings round her heavy eyes.

Ida did not answer; she was too weary even to notice the question. For the last few days her mind had been wound up to a tension whose strain had given way at last. The reaction had come, and within herself she felt a vague dread of fever, or insanity, or some overpowering illness. Well, perhaps it was better so, and yet she felt that she would not die without looking once more into her lover's eyes, or having a mother's words of love murmured into her ears.

But there is no wiser physician than nature, and in the long, dreamless sleep that folded Ida about like a garment that night, came balm, and strength, and solace. She rose the next morning feeling like another creature, and even willing to indulge in some faint hope for the future.

She dressed herself with care, after the breakfast which Mathilde had brought to her room, and smiled a little at the enthusiastic delight with which Mathilde hailed the returning glow of color in her cheeks.

"Madame has looked like a statue for the week past," said Mathilde, "and now, *grande ciel!* her face is like a new-blown rose. Shall I bring my own bonnet? Madame doubtless wishes me to attend her?"

"No, Mathilde, I am going to Grosvenor Street alone. Call a hackney coach for me!"

Mathilde obeyed, and presently returned with the news that the *fiacre* waited madame's pleasure.

Ida's heart pulsed high with tremulous hopes and fears as the vehicle rattled noisily through the crowded London streets in the misty fog of the September morning. The moment she had so long dreamed of and anticipated was near at hand; surely no evil fate could rise up to mar her happiness now!

The color came and went fitfully in her cheek as the hackman jumped from his seat and threw open the door of the coach with a bang.

"'Ere's the place, ma'am. No. — Grosvenor Street. Will I wait?"

"Yes; you may wait for me."

Ida glanced up at the house as she descended from the vehicle. It was a handsome red-brick mansion, built after the solid, substantial fashion of London houses, with stone facings and lintels, and an iron rail on either side of the shallow stone steps that led up to the door. The hackman rang the door-bell for her, before he returned to his seat on the box; and she stood waiting, almost ready to believe that it was all a delusion from which she would wake presently. A tall, solemn-looking man opened the door.

"Is Madame Avioli at home?" asked Ida, in a low voice.

"Yes'm," was the answer; "she's al'ays home afore twelve. Please walk in."

Through a softly carpeted hall he conducted the visitor to a large room, elegantly yet plainly furnished, with carpet and curtains of deep maroon, and tables scattered with books and flowers and little feminine trifles, while a deep easy-chair, drawn up in front of the grate, in which burned a fire of sea-coal, made not unnecessary by the rawness of the atmosphere, contained a crimson cashmere shawl, lying as if it had fallen from the shoulders of its recent occupant; and the clusters of newly cut roses, half lying on a table, half arranged in a slender-necked Bohemian vase of amber-tinted glass, betokened that the room had been vacant but a few minutes.

"What name, ma'am?" demanded the footman, pausing, with the door-knob in his hand as Ida advanced into the room.

"There is no name. I will announce myself. Tell her it is a lady—a friend of hers."

"Yes'm," said the footman, with a wondering stare, and once more Ida was left alone.

It seemed as if he had scarcely closed the door, when it opened again, revolving noiselessly on its hinges, and Mme. Avioli entered—Mme. Avioli, as beautiful as ever, in a light, fawn-colored silk morning-robe, trimmed with broad folds of cherry velvet, her soft brown hair as lustrous and luxuriant as ever, and her blue eyes instinct with the old liquid light which had once drawn Ida's heart to hers.

The look of surprise and expectation vanished from her countenance as she saw Ida's face; the blush rose suddenly to her cheek.

"Mrs. Delamere!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Madame Avioli, it is I!"

"To see me?"

Ida came to her with both hands extended and eyes suffused with tears. Mme. Avioli glanced into her face for one instant, and then, with an impulse which there was no resisting, clasped Ida to her breast.

"Ida, my dearest, we understand each other at last!" she exclaimed, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"Yes—at last!" murmured Ida. "And you have forgiven me?"

"No—for I know now that I had nothing to forgive. But I have not yet learned to forgive myself," was the whispered answer.

Mme. Avioli drew Ida to a seat beside her on the low sofa opposite the fire.

"Sit here, Ida," she said, "and tell me all about it. Only remember, dearest, it is seven years since we last met; and the last I heard of you, you were in Egypt, traveling with Madame d'Ancour. And here you walk in upon me in London, like a chapter out of our old Parisian life. Oh, I have so much to ask you—to explain to you!"

"I, too, have something to ask of you, Madame Avioli," said Ida, the red and white signals fluttering in her cheek, and her pulse throbbing quicker as she felt the moment of her new happiness approaching. "Let my question take precedence, please—just this once!"

"Ask on, dearest!"

"Madame Avioli—you had a daughter once—a dear and cherished child, who was taken away from you—but not by death?"

Mme. Avioli's cheek grew ashen pale; she dropped Ida's hand, and rose to her feet, as if moved by some unseen impulse.

"Ida, why do you ask me this?' she ejaculated.

"You loved her, then?"

"I—loved her—oh, God, be merciful to me! as I loved my own soul. Her memory is dearer to me yet than all the world beside. Oh, Ida, Ida! why do you strive thus to break my heart?"

"Her memory?" softly repeated Ida; "then she is dead?"

"Dead, dead!" wailed Mme. Avioli, wringing her slender hands, and pacing wildly up and down the floor, with a look of settled anguish on her face which Ida had never before seen there; "if she were not in her grave, my mother-heart would

have led me to her long ago. Oh, my child—my child—my little lost love!"

"Are you sure she is dead?" asked Ida, her voice thrilling the silence like the cooing tones of a dove, sad, yet infinitely sweet.

"Why do you wring my heart thus?" demanded Mme. Avioli, suddenly turning to Ida, with a piteous pleading in her look and accent.

"Because," Ida answered, slowly, "I, too, have lived apart from the love and cherishing that should, of right, have been mine. I never knew the pressure of a mother's heart, the tenderness of a mother's voice. Madame Avioli, do you suppose that if my lost mother had, unconsciously to herself, stood in my presence, her mother-heart would have guided her to me?"

Mme. Avioli had stopped in front of Ida, and was regarding her intently. A strong, convulsive shudder seemed to thrill through her slender frame; she put out her fluttering hands as if to draw something toward her, but they fell nerveless to her sides.

"Ida! Ida! why do you ask me this?" she faltered, growing pale and red by turns.

"Mamma," murmured Ida, nestling close to her bosom—"my dear mamma, take your child to your heart—the orphaned child, who has longed for this place so many, many years."

She laid the pearl cross, with its tiny golden chain, in her mother's hand as she spoke—the sign and token of her identity.

"Ida, is this true, my child? Where did you get this cross—the pearl cross my own hands clasped round your neck?" cried Mme. Avioli. "Oh! can I be sure that this is no baseless vision? Are you, indeed, my lost treasure? Let me look into your eyes—let me feel your heart beating against my own! Call me by the sweet name once again, or I shall believe that I have been deceived by some cruel dream!"

"Mamma"—Ida spoke the word as if it were infinitely sweet upon her own lips—"my own mamma!"

And Mme. Avioli sunk upon her knees to thank God for His mercy, with her face hidden in her daughter's lap, and one hand still tightly clasping Ida's fingers, lest the blessed gift should vanish away from her even yet.

"Ida," she said, looking up as her daughter's caressing touch strayed softly over her lovely disheveled locks, "how long have you known this? Who told you?"

"Giuseppe Antonardi told me, mamma."

"Giuseppe Antonardi," slowly repeated the countess. "Oh, that dark, evil man! But when, Ida? You have not yet told me when."

Ida bent over her mother's hand, pressing her lips to it as she answered:

"Seven years ago."

"You knew it when you were in Paris before?"

"Yes, I knew it then."

"And why—"

"Mamma," said Ida, anticipating the question that trembled on Mme. Avioli's lips, "it is a long and sad story, but I will tell you all. It was the false, cruel tongue of Giuseppe Antonardi that turned my heart away from you, even after I knew that I was your child, but it was through his confession, only a few days ago, that I learned how good and true you were—how foully I had been deceived."

"Where is he now—this Antonardi?" asked Mme. Avioli, passionately. "If there is law or justice in the land, he shall meet with his deserts. Oh, heavens! to think that he has deprived me of my child's love for seven years!" she was pale and rigid, and her lips quivered violently.

"Mamma," Ida's arms stole round her neck with soothing, tender pressure, "he is now beyond the reach of any earthly tribunal. Oh, be calm, be your own sweet self. Giuseppe Antonardi is dead!"

"Dead!" repeated Mme. Avioli, the rigid look melting from her features. "Is he indeed dead? But, Ida, I can not forgive him, even in the grave. He has wronged me so cruelly—he has blighted my life so fearfully!"

"But he has restored us to each other at the last, mamma. Now, listen to me, and you shall hear it all. There—close to my heart, so—with your cheek against mine. Oh, mamma, I never knew it was so sweet to have a mother!"

And with her newly found treasure clasped close to her, Ida told the story of her life—her lonely childhood spent in wandering from place to place at the fickle will of Pierre L'Echelle, who had taught her to believe she was an orphan; her brighter experience at Deepdale Rectory, and the brief, happy episode of her married life at Paris, when she had first met the Countess Avioli, ignorant of their relationship. Then followed the treacherous deception practiced by Giuseppe Antonardi, resulting in a total estrangement between the child-bride and her unknown mother, and, later, in the separation

which ended in the sudden and tragical death of her young husband.

"May God have mercy on Antonardi's soul!" murmured Mme. Avioli, growing white to the very lips, "for I can never forgive him for all the mischief he has wrought."

And then followed the brief recital of the life of travel which succeeded her early widowhood, ending in the sylvan seclusion of Beechcliff.

"I used to admire the sweet old place when I was a child," she subjoined; "but I never, in my wildest dreams, entertained the idea of living there. Mamma, you must come and be the queen of my little realm—it is the loveliest spot you ever saw. No valley on the Rhine is half so picturesque as Beechcliff—you will say so yourself when you see it."

"But, Ida," said Mme. Avioli, looking with a sort of searching tenderness into her daughter's face, "there is something you have not told me yet—an unrevealed secret in your heart."

Ida colored scarlet and tried to smile.

"How sharp your eyes are, mamma! Yes, you are right; there *is* something I have not told you yet—but I can not speak of it now. Some time, perhaps—when my heart is less full and my brain less wearied, for I shall have no secrets from you, mamma darling. But now you forget that I have to hear the story of my own life before I can myself remember it; the mystery of my solitude and desolation; the fate which threw me into the hands of villains like Pierre L'Echelle and Giuseppe Antonardi. Oh, mamma, it has been a puzzle to me all my life long—a wretched, heart-sickening enigma!"

Mme. Avioli looked at Ida's eager face with sad, tender eyes of compassion.

"My poor love," she said, caressingly, "I do not wonder at it. You have been the guiltless sufferer for the faults of others, the powerless instrument of a fate you neither understood nor were conscious of—a lonely, wandering child, brought up on the charity and tolerance of strangers, while the wealth of love that should have been yours was yearning in vain for some object upon which to expend itself. Yes, it is a mystery—a heart-sickening enigma, Ida, and I scarce know at which end of the labyrinth of the past to begin in telling you the whole."

She paused a moment, as if to reflect.

"Ida," she said, presently, "if I tell you the history of my life, it will involve the mystery of your own. Shall I confide all to you!"

"Am I not your daughter, mamma?" was the brief, reproachful response. And Mme. Avioli, gently pressing the hand that lay within her own, commenced.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE STORY OF A LIFE.

"CAN you carry your fancy back, dearest, to a period more than twenty years ago, and imagine me a fair, fresh-faced English girl of eighteen, with cheeks as rosy as your own—more so, I think, than they are just at this moment, and golden-brown hair hanging over my shoulders in a mass of shining curls?"

"I can imagine it very easily, mamma. But—English? Pierre L'Echelle was French, and he was my uncle, was he not?"

"True, Ida; but Pierre L'Echelle was only my half-brother, the son of a French woman; while I, younger by many years, was the child of my father's second marriage with an English girl, and was born in the heart of Lancashire. We were both left orphans very young, not without means, but Pierre L'Echelle, who had charge of me and my property, neglected the one and squandered the other, displaying to me such traits of character, that I soon learned to hate and despise him. I grew up pretty, at least, so people told me—and I was quite ready to give credence to their flattery—so pretty, in fact, that at eighteen, my brother Pierre hoped to pay a heavy accumulation of debt by delivering me over to his brainless young creditor, a French nobleman, with as little principle as his friend, in the shape of a wife. Monsieur de Vive thought that he loved me, and had no idea but that I should prove as docile to my brother's will as most French girls do to their guardians. But my English spirit and independence rebelled against this. I did not love Monsieur de Vive, and I did love another suitor, Mr. Liscombe, whom I had met frequently in the little society afforded me by my peculiar position. Pierre stormed the citadel of my heart in behalf of his friend by threats, entreaties, and commands; but in vain—and one night, when he came with renewed solicitations, I feigned to consent. Arrangements were at once made for a hurried marriage, but when, on the following evening, De Vive came to claim my promise, no bride awaited him. I had secretly fled to the English chapel in the place, and married Charles Liscombe. It was a rash, unpremeditated act, but I was infatuated with his handsome face and regular features, and

even had I cared nothing for him, I believe I should have married him to escape the persecutions of De Vive, whom I hated with an absolute dread and horror!

"I did not learn until after the act was irremediable, that I had made what the world would call a very good match. My husband—and your father, Ida—was the only son and heir of Lord Aden, of Adenham, in the county of Kent, but was exiled from his home in consequence of his idle and dissolute habits, and had not spoken to his father nor corresponded with him for years. Nor was I aware at the time of what I afterward learned, with mortification and regret, that Charles Liscombe had been engaged for a long period of time to his cousin, Lady Flora Aden, and that this engagement was the sole foundation upon which he based the hope of ever being restored again to his father's favor, Lady Flora being the old earl's especial darling. All this I learned when it was too late. Pierre L'Echelle, ascertaining these circumstances, and fevered with the desire for revenge, persecuted us with threatening to reveal the story of our marriage. Lord Aden was elderly and infirm, and my husband had hoped that, by concealing the fact of his secret marriage until after his father's death—which, in the natural course of events, seemed near at hand—the Adenham inheritance would reward his maneuvers. In the meantime, my own life was wretched, between the waning love of my husband, the threats of my brother, and the approaching peril of your birth, which hung over me like a great shadowy terror. And at length, when they placed a little girl in your father's arms as the inheritress of the ancient name and lineage of Aden, his wrath culminated and he swore a deep oath never to look upon your face again, since his dearest hope—that of a male heir—had been thus frustrated.

"Within three weeks of your birth, he was shot down in an affray between police and people in the streets of Paris, and buried as quietly as possible, to avoid further investigation by the legal authorities, leaving me alone with my fatherless little girl.

"How I loved you in those dreary days, Ida, you yourself can form no idea. You were all the world to me: my comfort, my treasure, my reward from the Lord, for all the sufferings of mind and body I had undergone. I repented nothing while you were in my arms—your soft eyes, so like, and yet so unlike those of your father, were sufficient for me to gaze into—your cooing baby voice was the sweetest music in the world to me. As a wife, I had been wretched and ill-treated—as a mother, my happiness was divinely perfect.

"For three years I lived so—the three happiest years of my life. I was poor, but I possessed the famous Adenham diamonds, which had passed to my husband through the special bequest of his uncle, a childless bachelor, from whom the then Lord Aden had inherited them, and Pierre L'Echelle advanced me sufficient money on these to maintain me in comfort, if not in splendor.

"At that time Lord Aden was taken suddenly ill, and Pierre L'Echelle made me believe that if my little child were carried to his dying bed, and recognized as the only offspring of his son, of whose death he was even then not cognizant, she would come into possession of the Adenham estates.

"I was young and inexperienced, and I believed him—moreover, I was just convalescing from a dangerous fever and unable to travel myself, so with a doubting heart I gave my little one into the charge of L'Echelle and his servant Giuseppe Antonardi, and pressed my parting kiss on her cheek, never dreaming, through all my misgivings, that it was to be for the last time.

"Oh, Ida, you, who are not a mother yourself, can never imagine or conceive the longings, the passionate yearnings, the indescribable despair which by turns filled my heart as the days and weeks went by and you did not return. At length, just as I had decided to risk everything, and go for you myself, Pierre L'Echelle came back, and without my child. 'She is safe,' he answered to my agonized pleadings, and refused to give me any more definite tidings. Lord Aden, it seemed, was better when L'Echelle and his little charge reached the neighboring hamlet of Adenham, and the latter learned from the old clergyman of the place that the faint allusion they had ventured to make to his son provoked such anger and wrath that they dared say no more.

"Evidently the time for reconciliation was not then. L'Echelle urged me to wait; the old man was weak and enfeebled by illness, and could not last long; and when I implored him to be allowed to go to my child, he sternly refused, alleging that my woman-heart and tongue would be sure to wreck all their plans. Driven by the strong impulses of nature, I rebelled, declaring that no earthly power should longer keep me from my babe.

"I shall never forget my brother's eyes as he looked into my face and said, slowly:

"'Would you peril your child's inheritance, and doom her to a life of beggary like your own, merely to gratify the selfish whim of seeing her?'

"'I would risk anything—everything—to be with her,' I answered, half maddened by the bereavement.

"'Very well,' he answered, with a smile that was cruel as the grave; 'then go to Adenham, ruin your daughter's prospects, and thwart all your own, if you like, but it will be a bootless journey. The child is far enough away from Adenham.'

"'Where is she?' I gasped.

"'Beyond the reach of your folly, Beatrice,' he answered. 'I foresaw this probable scene, and I have averted its consequences.'

"'I will go to Adenham, and appeal to the baby's grandfather.'

"'What good will that do? He can tell you nothing, and you will simply be blighting your own future.'

"I felt my own powerlessness, and sunk, half fainting, on the floor, covering my face with my hands.

"'Listen, Beatrice,' my brother said, watching me with folded arms, and a face which was as hard as adamant. 'When you gave De Vive the slip and married this English villain, I swore in my inmost heart to be revenged. The vow of a L'Echelle is never broken; you yourself can bear witness how I have kept mine.'

"'Pierre, Pierre!' I faltered, 'have mercy on me—give me back my child!'

"He turned away from me—his horrible revenge was not complete. Oh! Ida, it never was completed until now. He is dead and buried years ago, but his wicked plots still flourished on, through the agency of his accomplice, Giuseppe Antonardi.'"

"Mamma," soothed Ida, passing her hands lovingly over Mme. Avioli's throbbing forehead, "the past is over now, the present is all our own. God has given me back to you at last—remember that."

The words fulfilled their calming purpose. Mme. Avioli pressed her lips to her daughter's hand, and spoke out, in a gentler, less excited voice.

"You can judge, dearest, how these awful events racked my very soul when they first occurred, when, at this late period, they have such power to rouse me into the resentment and grief which should have grown dull with years. I was like one distracted. I threw myself at my brother's feet, praying and crying for mercy, but all in vain. I might as well have appealed to a marble statue for sympathy and pity.

"The years passed on—how I lived through them I can

scarcely tell. Looking back upon them, they seem to me like a hideous blank of suffering—a fevered trance. After a year or two, Pierre L'Echelle disappeared entirely from the orbit of my life, and all inquiry or search, as far as I ventured to institute it, proved futile. To this day I did not know where he was, nor what his purposes or occupations were. Reduced to poverty, I had recourse to my half-forgotten accomplishments for support, and became traveling governess to an Iatlian girl, the daughter of wealthy parents, who were anxious to give her every accomplishment. I think, starving though I was, I could not have been satisfied to settle down quietly even to a competence, but going from place to place with my pupil, I was supported and encouraged by the ever-present hope, dim and uncertain though it seemed, of sooner or later encountering my lost child. Had it not been for that possibility, I should have perished from heart-sickness and despair. As it was, I lived on, wretched and miserable, yet never totally without a lingering, sustaining hope!

"The night Pierre L'Echelle was murdered—although, until to-day, I never knew exactly how or when he met his end—I saw him by the merest accident at the American hotel where he was sojourning. Oh, had I but known then how near I was to my darling, how much suffering, how much pain we should both have been spared! But he was as relentless as ever, and I left the country ignorant of your past and future.

"Not long after, a note from Antonardi conveyed to me, in guarded sentences, the fact of my brother's death, leading me to infer that my child, too, had perished years before. The reason for this last malicious falsehood I can not guess, unless it was a consequence of Antonardi's hatred and fear of me, as one who had been unwillingly cognizant of many of the evil deeds for which he was answerable to the law.

"Almost at the same time I learned that Lord Aden had married a young wife, thus frustrating all my hopes of ever succeeding to the family estates, that were in no way entailed. He knew of his son's death, but was ignorant that he had ever been married, and I did not care to enlighten him. My husband's memory was not sufficiently pleasant to me to render me in any way anxious to court the favor of his relations, nor had I now a child whose interests I was bound to consider. This seemed to close the first canto of my life.

"The second seemed to open fairer prospects to me. The faded remnants of my girlish beauty were still sufficiently attractive to win the regards of Count Avioli, an Italian noble-

man of wealth and position, although many years my senior, and I married him, for rest and peace. This portion of my life was happy, if not ecstatic. I was surrounded by every luxury, and my wishes were anticipated almost before they had time to shape themselves into form by the devotion of my noble-hearted husband. His death, only a year or two after our marriage, left me not only wealthy but the possessor of an undoubted social station which rendered my position a most enviable one in the eyes of the world.

"Further than this, dear Ida, I have no history to relate. My life has been eventful beyond proportion to the number of its years, and I have often felt—ignorant of this blissful moment still in store for my future—that I cared not how soon the summons of death should come to end an existence so full of troubles and disappointment. When I met you at Paris, seven years ago, and was drawn toward you by one of those subtle, indefinable instances of sympathy which are so strong and unaccountable, I felt, for the time being, that there was still something worth living for—that perhaps some new interest might rise up to fill the empty void, the yearning space of my lonely heart. But then came your estrangement, to me so mysterious, so utterly without the shadow of a single reason, and once more my scarcely formed dreams were wrecked."

"Oh, mamma," whispered Ida, looking up with eyes swimming in remorseful tears, "how cruel I was."

"Cruel, but ignorantly so, my dearest," said Mme. Avioli. "Let us forget it all now. Let us remember only that we are restored to each other for the future. Oh, Ida, we can never be entirely alone again! Stand up, my own treasure; let me look at you from head to foot; let me feast my eyes upon the dear face that is my child's, and see if I can still trace the lineaments I have wept and prayed over so many times in your infancy. Yes, you are greatly changed, darling. I do not wonder that, when I met you in Paris, I failed to recognize you, yet now, looking at you with the eyes of my new enlightenment, I can see that you are my own Ida still. And Reginald—your husband—oh, my darling, if he could be with us now!"

The tears rose to Mme. Avioli's eyes as she spoke.

"Yes," said Ida, briefly, and in a constrained voice.

She never liked to speak or think of that past life in which she had received so much of love, and had been able to render back so little.

"I ought not to dim the happiness of the present hour by alluding to his death," pursued Mme. Avioli; "but he was

very dear to me. I honored him for his frank, noble nature, and respected the traits of character which were inherent to his temperament. He loved you very, very dearly, Ida."

"Yes," said Ida, "but, oh, mamma, tell me, was it my fault that I could not return his love in the same measure and degree? I tried to love him—I did indeed—and it is only since his death that I really knew what love was."

"And what has taught you the lesson now, Ida?"

Mme. Avioli looked with earnest, questioning eyes into her daughter's crimson face.

"Well, *n'importe*, Ida, I will not seek to force your confidence now. Perhaps you will yet live to know the blessings of that heart's companionship, which my own loveless life has taught me to value beyond aught else that earth has to give. Oh, Ida! I can wish you no greater happiness, and yet, if Reginald had lived, you might perhaps have learned your own heart and his, and been happy—for a nobler nature never existed than that which death has separated from you."

Ida shuddered.

"Oh, mamma, that never could have been. I did not love him—we were not suited to each other."

Mme. Avioli arose.

"Come to my room, Ida—you will not leave me again while we are in London, surely?"

"But I must return to my hotel for my things and Mathilde—the coach is at the door," said Ida.

"I will send a servant. I can not spare you again, *mia carissima!*"

And Ida yielded to the gentle despotism which was so sweet at a mother's hand.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE RETURN HOME.

"MAMMA," said Ida, one evening, a few days subsequent to that upon which the mother and child were so happily reunited, as she came to Mme. Avioli's side in the twilight, and nestled down on a low velvet ottoman at her feet, "when will you go home with me?"

"How? Do you mean to America?" questioned her mother, caressing the soft waves of silken hair which lay over her hands.

"Yes, to Beechcliff."

"Are you tired of London?"

"Not of London alone, mamma, but I am weary of the per-

petual change and glare and glitter of foreign life. I long to get back to the peace and stillness of my sweet old home on the Connecticut River. And, besides all this, mamma, I want to be in the spot where *he* told me of his love—where we used to wander through the woods and vales together—where I was so strangely, indescribably happy."

For Ida had confided to her mother's ears the story of the happiness which had so marvelously eluded her grasp; the love-tale which had been so brief and bright, but which had left within her heart such a weight of sadness and vague yearning. Poor Ida! she had indeed found a mother, but she could not but be conscious that she had lost something which might have been dearer and more precious still.

"My darling," soothed Mme. Avioli, bending to touch her daughter's forehead with her lips, "my heart goes with you in the wish. It shall be as you wish. We will go to your lovely Beechcliff whenever you choose. But, Ida, I have been wanting to ask you if it were not best to institute more inquiries, both here and in Paris, as to whether Mr. Dorrillon is in either place. Or perhaps a note to Admiral Tyndale in Scotland—"

"No, mamma, it is better not," said Ida, firmly. "I, too, have been thinking over these things, and I believe that it will be useless to remain here longer. We have no certainty that he has returned to Scotland, and in the vast concourse of Paris or London it would be vain to endeavor to ascertain the identity of any one person."

"But you have not abandoned the idea of finding him, my child?"

"No, mamma," Ida looked up with sparkling, earnest eyes, and cheeks slightly flushed. "I shall never abandon that resolve. But at Beechcliff I can easily obtain his address from Mr. Dudley, if—if you do not think it would be unwomanly for me to write to him—to Dorrillon."

"I should not regard it so, dearest," said Mme. Avioli; "but that is a question which only you must decide for yourself."

"I do not think anything can be unwomanly, mamma, while I love him and he loves me," rejoined Ida, with a dreamy, absent look.

"You are quite sure of it, Ida?"

"Of what, mamma?"

"Of both, darling."

"I am sure that I love him," said Ida, slowly, "because when I think of the possibility of never beholding him, my

heart grows sick within me, and I care not how soon death comes to set me free. I *must* see him, mamma—I *must* tell him that my heart is all his own!" Mme. Avioli breathed a scarcely perceptible sigh as she felt Ida's hand tremble within her own. It was all perfectly right and natural; she would not have had it otherwise; and yet she could not repress the momentary pang of regret at feeling that for the future she must be content with a secondary place in the heart of her newly recovered daughter, who was all the world to her. "And," went on Ida, all unconscious of the anguished strife that was rending her mother's heart, "that he loves me I am equally certain. I have seen it in his face—I have read it in his eyes. Oh, mamma, I will not—I *can not* rest until I have brought him back to my heart!"

Mme. Avioli sighed again. What would not Reginald Delamere, the young husband, who was now only a memory of the past, have given for the merest tithe of this love which Ida poured out so freely upon the man who seemed, in Mme. Avioli's lovingly jealous eyes, a rival to his dead claims? What a strange, inscrutable riddle was the human heart!

"When shall we go, then?" she asked, almost sadly.

"Would the day after to-morrow be too soon?" questioned Ida, wistfully.

"No; I have been anticipating this move, and am in some degree prepared for it. My little restless bird must not think that the flutterings of her wings have escaped my watchful notice!"

"Have I been so restless, mamma?" said Ida, laughing and blushing. "I thought I had concealed my feelings perfectly."

"It is not easy to deceive a mother's eye. Come, let us go upstairs; we have many things to pack, and Ellen and Mathilde must commence operations immediately, if you are to spirit us away so soon."

Mme. Avioli's apartment and that of her daughter, which communicated by folding-doors, now thrown wide open, were filled during the next day or two with a chaotic mass of dresses, jewelry, books, music, and the endless trifles which are indispensable to a woman's comfort, whether she is traveling or permanently established. Mathilde was buoyantly happy—Ellen, the staid waiting-maid of Mme. Avioli, was busy and silent, as became her sober English temperament.

Mme. Avioli herself was engaged in giving orders and watching their execution, writing notes of business or courtesy, and settling accounts—while Ida sat like one in a dream, her

cheek resting on her hand, and her eyes fixed steadfastly on the floor, trying to read the sealed mystery of the future which lay before her vision. Mme. Avioli observed her, quietly speaking ever and anon to her, to rouse her for a minute or two from the meditation.

"It is well for her to think," the mother decided within herself; "but she must not grow too absorbed; neither must I seek to read the secret of her heart just now—she is better by herself. Sympathy, if need there be of sympathy, must come later. My poor, poor little Ida! she is learning, perhaps too late, what real love is. God alone must help her through this trial, for human aid is powerless!"

So passed Ida Delamere's last days in England; and when she stood on the steamer once more, the salt air blowing back her curls, and calling deep, vivid roses into her cheeks, she felt that a great oppression was gone, and breathed more freely. The purple glow of the early autumn sunset had faded into dusk on the hills and woods of Beechcliff, and the full moon was rising like a tremulous shield of liquid pearl over the copse of maples and wild beech, whose leaves were just beginning to be tinted with the golds and crimsons that foretell the many-colored glories of a New England autumn. Although one or two light frosts had touched the tenderer foliage on the upland hills, the air was deliciously soft and balmy, and bore upon its wings the breath of late roses and beds of mignonette and trembling violets, while the amber mists through which the moon rose were translucent and radiant as the atmosphere of midsummer.

Mrs. Gresham, in her best black silk dress and net illusion cap, was holding high counsel with Mrs. Hyde in the housekeeper's room, while a flush of excitement on her cheek betokened the agitated state of her mind.

"To think, Mrs. Hyde," said the good lady, eagerly, "that the letters should have been delayed, so that we only got them at the same time with the telegram, which announces their arrival this very night. The postal arrangements must be in very great fault somewhere."

"I should think so, ma'am!" said Mrs. Hyde, respectfully.

"And such interesting letters, too," went on Mrs. Gresham. "Of course, I always knew there was a mystery connected with her birth, but who ever dreamed of her mother being a countess? And so handsome, too, if she is like this picture that Ida has sent me—but pictures do flatter sometimes, and I shouldn't think Ida's mother could be so much younger than I am—should you, Mrs. Hyde?"

"Indeed, ma'am, I don't know," said the housekeeper, somewhat bewildered by Mrs. Gresham's rapidity of enunciation; "people's ages differ."

"Do you suppose she speaks English, Mrs. Hyde?" asked Mrs. Gresham, excitedly.

"If I rightly understand the letter, which you were so kind as to read out aloud to me, ma'am, she isn't foreign, ma'am, only married to a foreign husband," explained the housekeeper.

"To be sure—so she is," said Mrs. Gresham. "A countess—and our Ida's mother—dear me, it seems almost impossible! And they will be here at seven o'clock—are you *quite* sure everything is right, Mrs. Hyde—the rooms all ready, and the dinner well started?"

"Yes, ma'am, quite sure," said the housekeeper, whose complacent dependence on her array of well-trainsd servants was a riddle in the eye of Mrs. Gresham, accustomed as she was to one domestic of the Irish persuasion, who had a chronic habit of forgetting. "Everything will be ready, Mrs. Gresham."

"When will the young folks be back from their picnic-party?" further questioned Mrs. Gresham, whose anxious mind seemed to find it totally impossible to rest in quiet.

"Not before eleven o'clock, ma'am, certainly—they were setting store on ridin' home by moonlight."

"I hope nobody'll take cold," said Mrs. Gresham. "To be sure, it's a warm night; but one can never be certain about damp air and draughts. I'm glad I made Angie take an extra shawl. Well, perhaps it's just as well—the travelers won't object to an hour or two of quiet after their long journey. A real countess! Dear me! I must go and see that Mr. Gresham gets his other coat on, for when he's once among those books, he don't have any idea of how the time goes."

She hurried away to the library, where her better half was contentedly established in an easy-chair, with a pile of folios beside him, deep in the pages of some learned volume.

"Mr. Gresham," she cried, bursting out into the middle of a polysyllabled sentence, "you've forgotten your coat."

"Forgotten my coat, my dear?" mildly echoed the reverend gentleman, with a downward glance at his glossy outer garment. "I think you are mistaken. I put it on as usual this morning."

"I mean your best coat."

"It isn't Sunday, my dear, surely!" said Mr. Gresham, letting his book fall with something of a scared look.

"Mr. Gresham, you're enough to make one crazy!" sighed his wife. "Don't you recollect that I told you to change your coat because Ida was coming home to Beechcliff with her mother, who is a countess—the Countess Avioli?"

Mr. Gresham looked bewildered.

"I remember about Ida and her mother, but I must confess I took no heed of any words concerning a coat. This one is very clean, I am sure."

"My dear! With a great darned spot on the shoulder!"

"Darns are no disgrace, Selina; and the coat is clean, although well worn, and a trifle shining at the seams, for—"

"But you must change it, nevertheless," peremptorily interrupted Mrs. Gresham; "so run upstairs as soon as possible; they may be here at any moment."

Mr. Gresham cast an appealing glance at his wife; but she was obdurate, and, with a sigh that might have melted the heart of a stone, the good man rose up from his chair and slowly took his way toward the chamber which had been allotted to his special use and behoof during the absence of the mistress of the mansion.

"Women are very unreasonable," pondered Mr. Gresham, as he slowly twisted himself out of the obnoxious garment. "The old coat was very comfortable, and had somehow grown, by long usage, to fit my joints and muscles as no new coat ever could do. Now, I don't suppose any living soul would know the difference between it and the new one, so long as I sit with my back toward them. However, I wonder where I put that memorandum I copied out of the London edition of Plato last night?"

The clergyman stopped short, staring vacantly into the air, as he rallied the forces of his memory in search of the forgotten memorandum.

"If it isn't down-stairs in the right-hand drawer of the library desk, it isn't anywhere," said he to himself, as he deliberately picked up the coat he had just thrown off, and elbowed himself into it again. "Oh, dear! I always told Selina this new coat was too tight, and it is not half so comfortable as the other one."

And so Mr. Gresham trudged down-stairs again, exceedingly ill at ease in the idea that he had sacrificed comfort to gentility, and got his "other coat on."

"These women never are satisfied until they have made a man miserable," was his internal comment, as he began the search for the missing document. "As if dear little Ida would know, or the countess care, whether I had any coat on at all."

While Mrs. Gresham was bustling round the house, watching the clock and running to look down the eastern avenue by turns, where a double row of spice-odored balsam-trees made a black-green awning of dense shadow from the porter's lodge to the carriage-gate. The porter's lodge was being kept by the gardener's little blind daughter, in the temporary absence of her father and elder sister.

As Minnie Riley sat singing on the door-stone, contentedly stroking the head of a fat, white kitten, she suddenly paused to listen.

"It isn't a carriage," she murmured to herself, "nor it ain't a horse, but it's footsteps coming along fast and steady. And it ain't the laborers on the quarry—it's a gentleman's tread; yes, and he's coming here. Company for the big house, I suppose."

And Minnie slipped off her perch and ran to open the gate as promptly as if she were not sightless.

She was right in her conjectures—a gentleman stood there, but she could not see that he was tall, dark, and stately, with a Spanish cloak thrown carelessly across his shoulders, and a light traveling-cap drawn low over his brows.

"Please, sir," cried Minnie, "if you're going to give me anything, don't toss it on the ground, like some of 'em do, but put it in my hand, 'cause I'm blind."

The stranger smiled at this rather broad hint, and drawing a piece of money from his pocket, laid it in Minnie's outstretched palm.

"Mrs. Delamere has not returned, I suppose?" he asked, in a voice that faltered strangely.

"No, sir," said the child, gleefully fingering her money; "she ain't got back yet; thank'ee, sir!" with a sudden recollection of the duties of gratitude.

"Is there much company at the house this evening?" he pursued, doubtfully.

"No, sir; they're all gone up the river, to a picnic, and ain't coming back till late, 'cause father said it was like fine folkses' thoughtlessness to keep him up till midnight, to open the gate."

"That is well," said the stranger, evidently relieved, and he struck up the graveled carriage-road, little Minnie still standing with her fresh cheeks pressed against the iron fretwork of the gate, listening intently to the hasty ring of his departing footsteps, and wondering in her small mind why he walked so fast.

Yes, Reginald Delamere was walking fast, but not fast

enough to escape from the demon of unrest within him that urged him ever restlessly onward.

"I am a fool," he pondered within himself; "yet I am powerless to check myself in this mad folly. I seem to have passed entirely out of my own domination, to be the sport of a fate which I can not escape. I had resolved, when the barbed arrow of my anguish was first rankling within me, to end, by my own suicidal deed, the life which is a wearisome burden to myself and a stumbling-block of possible offense to others. That brief madness, thank Heaven, was of short duration. My determination is now to leave this country forever by the earliest gleam of to-morrow morning's light—the wiser and more manly plan. Any coward can cut the Gordian knot of trouble with one stroke of a knife, one touch of a trigger. I have faults, but cowardice is scarcely to be reckoned among them, and my resolution is final now. Yet," he added, as he put aside the dense shrubberies, wet with the soft dews of the evenfall, and advanced into the sheltered lawn, where the drooping boughs of the trees shielded him from observation from the lighted windows of Beechcliff, whose red glow contrasted so strangely with the softer glow of the full-orbed moon above, "I can not resist the overmastering impulse which bids me come hither once more, and stand in the old spot by the fountain, where her hand lay for an instant in mine—to look again on the haunts of wood and field, which were so beautiful to me in the enchanted days when I was mad enough to believe that she might, in time, learn to love me. It is over now, the old fatal spell. I am effectually roused from the brief delusion, but I can not pass out of the Western World, which has been such a confusion of broken vows and blighted hopes to me, without one more glimpse at the lovely spot where she will dream away her bright existence. I have given up my rash idea of suicide. I shall be brave enough to take up my burden, and wait as patiently as may be for God's appointed time; but I can not wait *here*. My only safety is in total separation from her. Here, on the green slope of Beechcliff, I lay down all of hope, or pleasure, or ambition that life has to give—and hereafter my sojourn in the world will be that of a pilgrim, seeking in far-off lands for the slow coming of the Great Release."

He stood with folded arms, and head bowed down upon his breast, when the soft beams of the moonlight seemed to draw a magic circle round about him, and the descending drops of the fountain shone and glimmered like a golden veil before his eyes—the spot where he had seen Ida last!

"My treasure," he murmured through his set teeth, "the light of my eyes—the only woman I have ever loved! God help me to be true to her, to myself, in this last hour of peril! To have died for her would have been easy, but to live on, and never see her more, that is an ordeal more bitter than the grave! Ida! Ida! will you never know how more than faithful I have been? In this world, no! but in the next, where there is neither marriage nor giving in marriage, you will know it all, my wife, my darling, and perhaps you will learn to love me then!"

And as he stood there the cold drops started out on his marble-pale brow like dew. Truly, Reginald Delamere had spoken the truth—this *was* worse than death!

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MRS. GRESHAM AND THE COUNTESS.

MR. GRESHAM, with one pen back of his ear, another between his teeth, and a third convenient to his hand, was engaged in jotting down some manuscript notes at the library desk, when suddenly he felt the pens flying in all directions, and his shoulder grasped by a nervous hand, that of his wife.

"Quick, Mr. Gresham, quick!" ejaculated that lady, breathless with the haste wherein she had sped to the library; "they are coming."

"Who are coming?" slowly demanded the clergyman, staring at a pen which was sticking upright in the velvet pile of the thick Turkish carpet—his favorite pen, which, with his own hands, he had cut from a goose-quill and formed after the pattern dearest to his own heart.

"Why, Ida and the countess, to be sure—the carriage is coming up the avenue now—I see the lamps!"

"Well, let them come. Why should their advent be a signal for the destruction of all my pens?"

But Mrs. Gresham, despairing of the efficacy of argument in this particular case, wasted no more time or words, but seizing her husband by the arm, dragged him, by main force, out across the hall into the eastern portico, the Reverend Milo yielding himself mechanically a prisoner. As he passed a mirror on his way, with clusters of candles burning brilliantly on either side of it, in old-fashioned silver sconces, he caught a glimpse of a well-remembered darn on the left shoulder of his coat, and turned very red, as he darted a side-glance at his wife. To think that she had not discovered that he had his old coat on, after all!

"I don't know how it happened," thought Mr. Gresham, as he felt himself brought up with a jerk on the portico. "I am sure I did change my coat; and I don't think I have two coats with darns on the shoulders—zigzag darns, too! But as long as Selina don't notice it— However, here they come!"

In the same instant the carriage swept up to the door, and the brief bustle of arrival dissipated Mr. Gresham's misgivings with a new tide of reflection.

"I am sure I don't know how it was," Mrs. Gresham afterward told Angie. "It was all bustle and confusion, and I suppose, of course, I was introduced, although I don't remember anything about it until I was standing in the drawing-room with the countess talking to me as prettily and sweetly as if she had been a born American, holding both my hands, and thanking me for the kindness I had shown her friendless little one. I declare I cried like a child, and kissed her just as if she hadn't been a countess at all! And in the midst of all I happened to look up suddenly, and there stood your precious father, just in the glare of the chandelier, with his old coat on, and the great crosswise darn on the shoulder peeked out in full view, just as if it had been an ornament! I declare I never was so mortified in all my life! And I don't see how it happened, for I certainly sent him to change it just before they came. But your father isn't a bit like other people."

"No, mamma, he isn't," Angie answered, with the dimpling smile hovering round her lips; "and I am glad of it, too."

"Dinner is ready, Ida," Mrs. Gresham said, as Mrs. Delamere was turning away, after the congratulations of their first meeting had been exchanged. "Won't you come into the dining-room now?"

"I will go upstairs with Mathilde a minute or two first," said Mrs. Delamere, "if you don't mind the delay."

The smile with which she spoke faded from her lips as she slowly ascended the stairs, and entering her own apartment, sunk listlessly into a chair.

"There, Mathilde, take off my things," she said, languidly, "for I haven't a bit of life left."

"Is madame, then, so weary?" the girl asked, solicitously, as she removed the round straw hat and the light shawl Ida had worn.

"Yes, tired—tired," Ida repeated, dreamily.

"But to be sure," Mathilde said, "it was a long journey that, from London here."

"It is not the journey," said Ida, drawing off her gloves. "I don't know what it is that wearies me so—it is life, I think."

Mathilde looked wonderingly at her mistress; she had no consolation to offer in such a case as this. As the girl went into the inner room to get Mrs. Delamere's dressing-box, which had been carried up there with the other luggage, Ida drooped her head upon the arm of the easy-chair, sick at heart, and, as she said, weary beyond the power of words to express. How sad this coming back to Beechcliff was, in spite of the bright anticipations she had woven round it! How dreary the prospect of the long, monotonous years of life that lay beyond! Through the entire journey she had clung to the hope that Dudley would be able to give them some clew to his friend's address. It all seemed so plain—so probable—surely there could be no difficulty about it. And when, in obedience to a penciled card sent him by Ida, Mr. Dudley had paid his respects to the ladies at the Metropolitan Hotel, where they had stopped for a few hours, between the arrival of the steamer and the departure of the northward train, she was completely stunned and taken by surprise to hear Dudley's nonchalant answer to her eager question concerning the whereabouts of his Scotch friend.

"Upon my word, I haven't the least idea. I didn't even know he had left town. But it's just like him, exactly—he always was a wandering Arab sort of fellow. Address? No, of course he didn't leave any address with me. I know he's not in Scotland, for it was only yesterday I got a letter from Admiral Tyndale, and the old gentleman seemed to take it for granted that Dorrillon was with me. However, I dare say he'll turn up all right one of these days; and I, for one, am not surprised at any sort of freak he may choose to take into his head."

That was all the information he had to give; and Mme. Avioli, pitying her daughter's blank look of despair, excused themselves to him on the plea of weariness from their journey, and Dudley took his leave, saying to himself, that seasickness certainly made that poor little Mrs. Delamere look as if her face was carved out of alabaster.

As Ida sat in her room at Beechcliff, in the still apathy of a breaking heart, a soft hand touched her, and Mme. Avioli bent over her.

"Ida—my daughter."

The tears, like a blessed torrent of relief, rushed into Ida's eyes.

"Oh, mamma, I am so miserable."

"My child, try to endure it; it is the lot of all women," said Mme. Avioli, sadly.

"But, mamma, I had thought about it so much—it seemed so near to me—oh, mamma, I *can not* give it up!"

And Mme. Avioli, holding her daughter's cheek close against her bosom, with her lips pressed against the dark, silky hair, thought within herself that it was the even-handed retribution of Providence, thus denying to Ida the same love which Reginald Delamere had once sighed for in vain.

But she only murmured soothing words, remembering the anguish of unreturned affection which had overshadowed the days of her own youth; and Ida had wept herself quiet and composed before Mathilde, who had been motioned back by Mme. Avioli, when she would have entered, a few moments before, presented herself; and Mrs. Gresham, who was watching at the dining-room door, thought she had never seen Ida look so lovely, with carmine cheeks, and eyes that glittered like dusk diamonds, when she came down to dinner, in a light pearl-gray silk, with purple, sparkling amethysts in her ears and at her throat.

"Ida," whispered Mrs. Gresham, detaining the younger lady a moment, as Mme. Avioli passed into the room, "ought I to call her 'Your ladyship' when I speak to her? I never was acquainted with a countess before."

Ida broke into a merry laugh.

"'Your ladyship,' indeed! No, certainly not—she is plain mamma," said Ida.

"But I can't call her mamma," said Mrs. Gresham, with a puzzled countenance.

"Call her Madame Avioli—that is quite sufficient."

And Mrs. Gresham went to the head of the table, quite relieved that this puzzling point was settled.

She had a great deal to tell Ida about the occurrences which had happened at Beechcliff during her absence, and concerning the approaching marriage of Angie to Mr. Cleve, with various other items of neighborhood news; and Ida tried to answer appropriately and look interested; but ever and anon she found herself relapsing into abstracted reverie, until at length Mme. Avioli good-naturedly took off Mrs. Gresham's attention by the description of the wedding of some duchess's daughter or other in London which she had recently attended, with a detailed *résumé* of the dress of bride and bride-maids—a topic vitally interesting to Mrs. Gresham just at this par-

ticular juncture of her life—and Ida took advantage of the momentary leisure to stand out upon the western portico.

"I shall suffocate if I stay there a moment longer!" thought poor Ida.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE moonlight, clear and soft as melted pearl, lay over the lovely lawn as Ida stepped out upon the marble floor of the portico and made the sylvan scene look like an enchanted vision. Ida breathed more freely as she leaned on the marble railing and drank in the exquisite beauty of the landscape, her pearl-gray dress shimmering around her as if she, too, were robed in the moonlight.

"How much pleasanter it is out here!" she murmured to herself. "Oh, I wonder if the idle talk of the outside world will always be as wearisome to me as now! Perhaps the bitterness will pass away after awhile, and yet it never can entirely. I must live on as people do after the light and sunshine have passed out of their lives—I must learn to be contented with the gray shadow and the quiet and the eventless days! Oh, well, it can not last forever—only a few years at best, and the weary vigil will be over."

With these thoughts slowly shaping themselves in her mind, she descended the broad portico steps and passed down into the quiet serenity of the lawn, where the flowers blossomed around the rim of the fountain, and the drip of the waters played a quiet, perpetual tune in the silence. Her heart throbbed as she came close to the fountain—now the associations called up another scene, scarcely more than a month ago, when she had stood there in the starlight, her hand resting, as it rested even now, on the marble edge of the basin, and another beside her pleading the story of his love. So short awhile ago, yet divided from her now, as it seemed to her exaggerated fancy, by an eternity of grief and disappointment, so brief a glimpse of love, to be followed, alas! by years of desolation and solitude! How little had she thought then that she saw him for the last time; how far she had been from anticipating how and when she should next stand there—alone!

The tears dropped from her eyelashes and sparkled on her cheeks as she leaned against the flowery edge of the fountain, and a low, sobbing sigh broke from her lips.

"If I could erase from the records of life the days and weeks that have passed—if I could turn back the wheel of

time and stand beside him once more!" she murmured, scarcely above her breath. "Oh, Frederic, shall I never see you more?"

Softly, like the murmurous sound of the low wind among the leaves, the drooping boughs of the elm were put aside, and the electric consciousness of a second presence on the lawn beside her thrilled through Ida's soul, even before she turned and saw that she was not alone!

"Ida!"

She uttered a low cry, clinging to the fountain rim for support. Was the overtried brain giving way? was this the premonition of coming delirium which conjured up impossible visions? or was her lover dead in foreign lands, and this, his specter, come back to haunt her?

"Oh, speak to me—speak to me, for Heaven's sake, Ida!" he said, in accents that trembled strangely in their depth. "Tell me that it *was* my name you spoke, or else"—and his brow hardened with rigid despair, as he heard no sound issuing from the parted lips of the woman who stood before him like a beautiful statue, "let me go away from you forever—forever—to curse the hour in which I first looked upon your face!"

He turned from her, striding across the lawn like a dark shadow in the moonlight—she put out her hands imploringly.

"Frederic! Frederic! come back to me!"

And before she was fairly conscious of her own movements, she had followed him, and stood with both hands laid pleadingly on his arm, and her eyes lifted, full of appealing light, to his face.

"Frederic, I love you; I can not live without you!"

She could feel the strong thrill that convulsed his whole frame as she spoke, but she did not draw away the hands he had taken into his own.

"Ida, let me hear the words again. Speak them once more that I may be sure that I am not deceived by the testimony of my own senses!" he said, slowly, still looking down into her eyes.

There was neither fear nor shrinking coyness in her nature now—only the strange, passionate outcry of one human heart speaking to another.

"I love you! stay with me—for life, without your answering love, would be a gift not worth the acceptance! I love you, Frederic!"

He drew her tenderly so close to him that he could feel her heart pulsing against his, her soft hair stirred by the deep, strong respirations of his breath. This, then, was the moment

for which he had hoped and waited all these years—the fruition of his life's harvest—the goal he had striven for—silence and despair, for so long! She loved him at last—she had given the treasure of her heart voluntarily into his keeping.

"Ida," he whispered, as she laid her cheek against his breast—"Ida—my wife!"

"Your wife that is to be, dearest," she answered, looking up with something of surprise into his face.

"My wife now, by all the laws of God and man!" he answered, firmly. "Oh, Ida, Ida! look into my face, and tell me if you have indeed so utterly forgotten the man who was once your husband!"

She disengaged herself from his arm, and stood back a pace or two, startled and very pale.

"My husband is dead, and buried at Naples. He perished seven years ago," she said, speaking as if a great weight lay on her chest.

"Dearest—nay, do not start from me as if I were a cold, wave-drenched corpse. Feel my hand—it is warm and living; let me touch my lips to your forehead. Is that the contact of a corpse?"

"What do you mean? You are not—"

"I am Reginald Delamere, your own husband, dear one, who was not drowned off the Island of Ischia, but stands here, living, before you. Sweet love, I never would have claimed your hand without your heart; but now that you have freely given me your love, I may at last tell you how dearly you have been cherished in my widowed heart all these years. Do not tremble so. Sit down here beside me, on this rustic chair, with your head against my shoulder—so—and let me tell you the strange, romantic history that has singled me out for its hero."

And there, in the lucid moonlight, with the silver drops of the fountain filling in the pauses of his low-spoken narrative, he told her the strange recital, while her heart throbbed within her at the noble chivalry of the nature which had so long gone unrewarded, and the deep tide of love grew stronger as she listened.

"Oh, Rex, is this real?" she murmured, when at length he ceased speaking. "Are you my husband come back from the dead?"

"It is real, dearest, and I am your husband come back, not from the dead, but from the forgotten. Now tell me once again, after all that I have related to you—do you love me?"

"I love you, Rex," she whispered, twining her hand in his with a motion he would have given worlds for some years ago.

"I *do* love you. I can not find words to express how dearly!"

He pressed the little warm hand tenderly in his own.

"But, Rex—suppose—"

She stopped here, and he finished the sentence for her.

"Suppose you had taken it into your capricious little head to fall in love with some one else and marry him? Is that the question that is hovering on your lips?"

"Yes."

"Then, dearest, the record on my grave-stone would have wiped out the possibility of any sin on your part," he answered, quietly.

"Rex, you do not mean—"

"I do mean that I would have died to save you a pang, Ida. What would my life have been worth to me in that case? Not the turning of a finger."

She nestled closer to his heart, as if the possible fear thrilled her into awe.

"But, Rex, how could you have been so silent all these years?" she asked.

"I had learned the lesson of self-government, Ida," he answered; "but there were times when I was here, in your presence, that the shallow tissue of concealment was nearly rent asunder."

"Do you mean the night when we stood here beside the fountain and you told me of your love? Oh, Rex, if you had only spoken then!"

"I was not sure of your heart, Ida," he answered, in a low voice.

"And, oh—but I have so much to tell you, Rex, and—"

She stopped abruptly, the sentence half completed. Mme. Avioli was calling to her from the terrace beyond.

"Ida, you have been out too long in the night damps. Come in now, dear."

And as her eyes, straining through the moonlight, perceived that Ida was not alone, she added, with something of surprise in her accents:

"Who is that with you?"

Ida rose, with a glance into her husband's face, where shy, exultant triumph and a fullness of trusting love shone softly out, and together they walked toward the house.

"Madame," she said, as Mme. Avioli came half-way down the steps to meet them, "this is my husband!"

"Why, it is Mr. Dorrillon!" called out Mrs. Gresham, who had followed the countess to the door opening on the portico.

"No!" said Ida, her voice thrilled with low, tremulous happiness, as her head rested on her husband's arm, "he's my husband, Reginald Delamere!"

And the young husband, standing in the moonlight beneath the shadows of the stately portico columns of Beechcliff, felt that he had at last conquered Fate, and won, by his own unaided efforts, the brightest jewel in all life's coronet!

* * * * * * *

What more have we to tell? Our tale is ended. The golden thread of Love is woven into the fabric of story, and the pen which has so long followed the changing fortunes of Ida Delamere leaves her, at last, a loved and loving wife!

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